

Thursday-Friday, April 9-10, 1999

Say it with flow

policy

Husband's son leads to divorce

NVO donors welcome Assad

Controversial move steps forward

base

King leaves today for Oman, UAE

AMMAN (AFP) — His Majesty King Abdullah leaves today for official visits to Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for talks with Gulf leaders. King Abdullah is due to meet with Sultan Qaboos during his 24-hour visit to Oman on Saturday before heading to the UAE, where he will meet on Sunday with Emirati President Sheikh Zayed Ben Sultan Al Nahayan.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية نصدرة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية للراي.

King, Queen receive Queen Noor at airport

AMMAN (Petra) — Their Majesties King Abdullah and Queen Rania last night received at the airport Her Majesty Queen Noor and Their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Hamzah, Prince Mohammad Ben Talal and Princess Taghrid, who arrived from London. King Abdullah and Queen Rania were accompanied by Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti, HRH Prince Rashid and the British chargé d'affaires in Amman. Prince Hamzah will spend three weeks in the Kingdom before leaving for London to resume his studies at Sandhurst.

Volume 24 Number 7115

AMMAN SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 1999, DHUL HILJA 24, 1419

Price: Jordan 200 Fils

Jordan's ties with Arab states to be based on mutual respect — King

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah has said in an newspaper interview that Jordan's relations with Israel will not be at the expense of the Kingdom's ties with Arab countries, particularly Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Palestine.

"I have no problem with any other Arab country, and in the new era we are opening a new stage with all Arab states based on mutual respect," the King said in an interview published Friday by the London-based Arabic daily Al Quds Al Arabi.

In reference to Jordan's relations with Egypt, the King said: "Coordination between both countries is at its highest levels."

With reference to Syria, King Abdullah expressed his admiration for Bashar Assad, son of President Hafez Assad. The King said that when the young Assad visited Amman to offer condolences on King Hussein's passing, he spoke about his visions for the future of Syria.

"Bashar Assad expressed his views about political changes in and modernisation of his country to meet current developments throughout the world," King Abdullah said.

On relations with Arab Gulf

states, the King said: "We maintain good relations with these states and we understand their present financial circumstances, and that's why we did not ask for assistance or financial grants, but look forward to close economic cooperation that ensures the interests of both sides, like opening the door to Jordanian workers and opening the markets to Jordanian industrial and agricultural products."

However, the King added that "we do not establish relations with an Arab country at the expense of another, and we look for good relations with all Arab states on the basis of common interests. In this respect I will pay state visits in the coming few days to Syria, Libya, Oman, the UAE and Qatar."

King Abdullah, who was scheduled to leave for the UAE and Oman on Saturday, said: "Jordan will not be drawn to any form of military or political intervention in Iraq. We are at the start of a new era and we give priority to our domestic affairs and to putting our home in order and strengthening national unity. Therefore, we have no ambition to play a regional role in Iraq or in any other country."

We have clarified this point to the Gulf countries' officials. What concerns us in Jordan is seeing a united and stable Iraq and Iraqi people relieved of their suffering. Jordan will not serve as a springboard for any military or hostile actions against Iraq."

King Abdullah said there is no political or media activity by the Iraqi opposition groups in Jordan.

Jordanian papers tackle Iraqi issues in a manner that is more inclined towards neutrality, although some of the articles continue to express sympathy towards the Iraqi people, the King said.

Some of the papers demand the lifting of the sanctions and warn against alleged U.S. conspiracies to partition Iraq, King Abdullah said.

With reference to the Palestinian question, King Abdullah said: "I have agreed with President Arafat not to allow a third party to come between us or try to exploit any differences in our points of view. We have also agreed to maintain direct contacts between us and to hold consultations about every question and remove any misunderstanding that might crop up."

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Bodybuilder stripped of title 'admits' taking banned substance

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — A Jordanian bodybuilder who was stripped of his title by the International Body Building Federation (IFBB) following a positive drug test has indirectly admitted using medicines containing substances that could be considered as performance-enhancing drugs.

Mustafa Hassanein, who won the over 90-kilogramme bodybuilding contest in Turkey last November, was reportedly disqualified from the championship and stripped of his medal.

An IFBB report, which was obtained last week by the Jordan Times, indicated that Hassanein was not among the medal winners at the 1998 IFBB Men's World Amateur Bodybuilding Championships in Izmir.

IFBB regulations stipulate that doping offences require a two-year suspension for a first offence and a lifetime suspension for a second offence. National federations are also fined if they fail to ensure that their national team members are competing drug-free.

Updated results obtained from the IFBB made no mention of Hassanein as a gold medal winner, which went to

the Russian bodybuilder Sergei Chelestov, while second place was given to the Ukrainian national Oleg Protas.

The IFBB results noted that the "final placements differ from those originally posted and reflect results of the doping control tests conducted on medalists after the finals."

Hassanein told Jordan Television on Friday that following an injury he sustained last year he was advised by his Austrian doctor to use cortisone and another medication which apparently included banned substances.

"I did not know that this substance could last in the body for 14 months..." Hassanein told Jordan Television.

"I have undergone many medical checks but the mistake [I made] is to use the cortisone, which is not considered as a drug but in fact is prohibited by the International Olympic Committee," Hassanein added.

"The IFBB report came as a shock to me. It has damaged not only my reputation but my country as well," said the Jordanian bodybuilder, who currently resides in Vienna.

During the TV show, Minister of Youth and Sports Mohammad Kheir Mamsar said that a severe punishment would be handed down to Has-

sanein if it were proven that the IFBB's report was true.

Mamsar indicated that he has received a letter from IFBB President Ben Weider in this regard and his ministry is investigating the validity of the report.

"We shall support you until it is otherwise proven. But if the drug offence is proven, we will be very tough in our decision against you and our decision will be tougher than the IFBB decision," Mamsar, who was addressing Hassanein through a telephone call in the JTV show, said.

The Arabic daily Al Arab Al Yawm on Thursday published what it described as the IFBB report, in which the federation mentioned that it had disqualified the Jordanian national from his title.

"Hassanein loses his title because the Doping Control [Committee] has confirmed that Hassanein took steroids in big quantities... I hope that it will be a big lesson for all bodybuilders," the IFBB report quoted Weider as saying in the one page report.

The report, dated Feb. 2, indicated that a copy of it was circulated to all IFBB members, including Jordan.

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A woman inspects damage to a family house in Aleksinac, 160 km south of Belgrade, on Friday. The NATO aerial campaign against Yugoslavia has entered its third week (AP photo)

Yeltsin warns of war over Kosovo; new NATO strikes on Good Friday

124 injured at hit factory; envoy's bid to free U.S. soldiers fails

BELGRADE (Agencies) — NATO unleashed wide-ranging air strikes against Yugoslavia on Orthodox Good Friday, with fiery hits on an oil depot and a weapons complex containing the factory that makes the Yugo car.

In Moscow, President Boris Yeltsin got tough with the West, warning NATO not to drag Russia into Kosovo because it could spark a European or even world war.

Alarm bells rang after Russia's Interfax news agency reported that Yeltsin had ordered strategic missiles to be reprogrammed to targets in NATO states bombing Yugoslavia.

The United States said it had been assured by Moscow that Russia would stay out of the Yugoslavia conflict and had not targeted NATO countries with nuclear weapons.

"We've been officially reassured at a high level that Russia will not be drawn into the conflict in the Balkans," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said.

NATO's supreme commander, U.S. General Wesley Clark, said Yeltsin's warning would not stop the bombing: "We're going to continue with the mission exactly as planned regardless of political and diplomatic atmospheres."

Although the Kremlin denied the missile reports, Yeltsin changed track dramatically from the hitherto unconditional line that Russia would not be sucked into the Kosovo conflict.

"I told NATO, the Americans, the Germans: Don't push us towards military action," he said in televised comments during a meeting with parliamentary speaker, Gennady

Selezniov. "Otherwise there will be a European war for sure and possibly world war."

Selezniov had also quoted the president, who is under pressure from a hostile parliament weighing his possible impeachment, as saying he supported Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic's request to join the union of Russia and Belarus.

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov was the first to break hours of strange silence on Selezniov's announcement that Yeltsin had ordered the retargeting of nuclear missiles at NATO.

He denied that any new orders had been given to target NATO countries but hit out at the military alliance. "If we assess the situation objectively, we clearly see that with every passing day the NATO operation is increasingly demonstrating its senselessness, both political and military," he said.

The U.S. State Department said Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would meet Ivanov in Oslo next week to discuss Kosovo.

Meanwhile, former Cyprus President Spyros Kyprianou failed in his bid to win the release of three captured U.S. soldiers.

After meeting with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, the Cypriot said Yugoslavia "cannot resort to any peaceful gestures" in light of the air strikes, which the allies have vowed to continue.

The White House, which has demanded the men's unconditional release, said it was not surprised. "We did not have great expectations" about Kyprianou's effort, deputy press Secretary Barry Ivie said.

With the NATO air campaign in its third week, tensions were spiking along Yugoslavia's borders with neighbours Albania and Macedonia.

Yugoslav forces fired heavy machine guns at KLA fighters in a seven-hour clash along Albania's northern frontier, international monitors said. And Macedonia reported its forces fired into Yugoslavia after a Macedonian soldier was shot dead on the border a day earlier.

The Yugoslav army later issued a harsh statement accusing Albania of "aggression" and saying those supporting the KLA would "have to bear the consequences for the eventual flare-up of the war in the Balkans."

NATO leaders, meanwhile, pointed to what they said were air strike successes against Serb police and army units on the ground in Kosovo, which are blamed for many of the alleged atrocities against the province's ethnic Albanians.

Their lines of communication are being cut, their vehicles' assembly areas are being attacked, their supplies are running low and they are taking casualties," Gen. Sir Charles Guthrie, the British chief of defence staff, said Friday. "They are on a slippery slope."

The latest wave of allied attacks late Thursday and Friday targeted Yugoslavia's military-industrial plants, fuel depots and communications facilities.

A hit on Jugopetrol storage depot at Smederevo, 30 kilometres east of Belgrade, ignited an enormous fireball. Dense black smoke engulfed nearby vineyards and fruit

orchards in spring bloom.

NATO jets struck twice late Thursday and early Friday at several targets in Kragujevac, an industrial town 90 kilometres south of Belgrade, targeting the Zastava industrial complex, the state-run Tanjug said. It said 124 people were hurt.

Workers at the plant, Serbia's biggest employer, had earlier organised a human shield to deter NATO bombing.

The sprawling facility contains a major weapons factory as well as the country's only auto plant, which makes Yugoslavia's trademark small, boxy Yugo cars.

There was no word on whether the automaking part of the facility was affected, but Tanjug said the complex's "most vital" installations were hit including a power plant it said provided heat for hospitals and schools.

Other attacks were reported near a Serbian television relay station near Jagodina. NATO had threatened to go after Serbian television sites for allegedly spreading lies and propaganda about the air campaign and Serbian TV called on viewers to form a "human shield" in front of its building in downtown Belgrade on Friday night.

The independent Beta news agency also reported NATO struck targets early Friday in Bubanj Potok, a garrison district in the southeastern part of Belgrade. And Studio B television said early Friday over the capital and around two towns, Uzice and Pozega, about 100 kilometres to the south.

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Top Palestinian official advises Arafat not to delay statehood

RAMALLAH (AFP) — A top Palestinian official warned Yasser Arafat Friday against any delay in declaring a Palestinian state as Israeli officials cautioned that talks on the final status of the territories could last as long as three years.

Giving in to international pressure not to declare an independent state when interim peace accords expire on May 4 would damage Palestinian national interests, said Assembly speaker Ahmad Qoreia, one of the principal architects of the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements.

"A delay would have a grave impact on Palestinian interests," he argued in full-page articles in the Palestinian dailies Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida.

"The Palestinian leadership would lose credibility both domestically and internationally," he said.

Qoreia is the first Palestinian official to speak out publicly against the mounting international pressure on Arafat to defer declaration of a Palestinian state until after Israeli elections on May 17 and June 1 to prevent it becoming a campaign issue.

Arafat is currently on the last, Far Eastern, leg of an international tour aimed at gauging the opinion of world governments on Palestinian statehood, and last week the Palestinians gave the first hint that they might bow to pressure to delay the declaration.

The various Palestinian parties will meet before the end of April to decide whether to declare a Palestinian state (on May 4) or postpone the declaration for a limited time," Palestinian International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath told reporters in Cairo.

But the Palestinian speaker said that world leaders were mistaken if they believed that a declaration of statehood would play into the hands of the hawkish government of right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"On the contrary, a delay would give his campaign a major fillip by allowing him to present himself as a strong prime minister who protects Israeli interests and forces concessions from the Palestinians," Qoreia said.

Prolonging the interim five-year period of Palestinian autonomy agreed at Oslo, "would give Israel longer to continue its policy of expanding Jewish settlements [in the occupied territories], Judaizing Jerusalem and prevaricating over the release of Palestinian prisoners," he said.

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Rawabdeh government wins strongest vote of confidence in history

Prime minister pledges to improve economy, strengthen Arab ties

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, armed with the strongest parliamentary vote of confidence in Jordan's history, has promised to do his utmost to bring the country out of an economic recession, forge ahead with the peace treaty with Israel and improve ties with Arab states.

Rawabdeh, speaking on Thursday at the end of a three-day debate before his government won 66 votes in the 80-member House, said the government was ready to review

controversial press and public freedom laws — a main demand of opposition parties and human rights groups at home and abroad.

After the parliamentary session, His Majesty King Abdullah visited the Prime Ministry and congratulated Rawabdeh.

In his policy statement submitted last Saturday, Rawabdeh indicated that the government will contact its debtors to reschedule, scrap or transfer some of its foreign debt into grants.

During Thursday's session, only 12 lawmakers withheld confidence in

Rawabdeh's 23-member Cabinet, the first named since King Abdullah assumed the Throne, while two other deputies abstained.

Five centrist deputies including pro-government lawmaker Abdul Karim Dughmi, five leftist and two Islamist MPs withheld their confidence in Rawabdeh's team.

"Rawabdeh received such a ringing endorsement because his programme was convincing and he is respected by deputies for his intelligence and competence," one deputy, who asked not to be named, said.

"The absence of opposition mem-

bers and keenness to show support for the King and his government explains the high number of votes Rawabdeh received," the deputy told the Jordan Times.

The Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, the Islamic Action Front, boycotted the 1997 parliamentary elections over the enactment of a controversial Election Law.

In his rebuttal on Thursday, the premier described his government statement as a "strategy that cannot be implemented in days, months or years."

"Our policy statement is a letter of

intent... requiring an outline of priorities, which we will do," the premier told lawmakers. He was interrupted several times by applause from citizens attending the three-hour session.

Rawabdeh, who accompanied King Abdullah on a trip to Saudi Arabia last week, stressed that his government intends to strengthen its ties with all Arab states "with no exception," adding that Jordan will never resort to the "axis policy" of one Arab party against another.

Analysts believe that the government's foreign policy will focus on Arab relations, especially ahead of

the May 17 Israeli elections. Jordan is keen not to appear to be supporting any particular party in the Israeli polls.

The premier was echoing King Abdullah's instructions in his letter of designation to Rawabdeh to focus on maintaining strong ties with Arab states, especially those neighbouring the Kingdom.

The King is scheduled to begin a visit to Oman and the United Arab Emirates on Saturday. He is expected to hold talks with Syrian President Hafez Assad later this month.

During the session, Rawabdeh cast

doubt on his government's ability to reach the three per cent economic growth rate envisioned in the 1999 budget, which was submitted by the former government headed by Faysal Tarawneh.

"To be frank with you, this is an estimate figure. I expect this year's growth rate will be less than the figure [forecast] due to the decline of some [economic] sectors especially agriculture, as well as the political and economic situation in the region," Rawabdeh said.

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JPA criticises Al Arab Al Yawm's move to sack 17 of its employees

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — The Jordan Press Association (JPA) slammed Al Arab Al Yawm's board of directors for sacking more than a dozen of the daily's employees last week saying it will counter such measures legally to defend their rights and livelihood.

In a letter to the daily's chairman of the board, Riyadh Hroub, the JPA expressed deep concern about and disapproval of the recent firing of the paper's employees saying such actions had been taken before and that Hroub had then personally vowed not to repeat them.

"We hope that this is only a bad rumour, if not the JPA council will counter such unjustifiable measures legally in the defence of their colleagues' rights and livelihood," said the letter on Thursday.

But on Friday evening after a two-hour emergency meeting of the JPA council, it was confirmed that around 17 Al Arab Al Yawm employees had indeed been dismissed.

According to JPA's Deputy President Tareq Momani, the employees

were served notice of their dismissal on Thursday. He said eight of them are journalists.

Momani told the Jordan Times that several of those who were sacked approached the association for help.

The council requested Al Arab Al Yawm's General Manager Adnan Hussein attend the Friday meeting, during which he confirmed the dismissal of the employees saying it fell within an article in the Labour Law concerning "labour organisation."

"Hussein told us that the paper was going through a restructuring phase and had demanded the heads of departments recommend the most needed in order to sack the surplus," Momani added.

He said Hussein told them that the 17 were the only group of employees to be sacked from the paper. However, an editor at the daily who requested anonymity, said this was only the first group at present and that there were more to come.

At the end of the meeting, Momani said the council remained unconvinced by Hussein's arguments and

demanded to meet Hroub to reconsider the dismissals.

He said the council will remain on call to pursue the case and will take further measures, including legal action, and sit-ins if Hroub does not respond.

"This is not an individual case, it includes everybody, and we have to teach all media institutions not to resort to such measures against its employees," Momani added.

Journalist and JPA-member Jamal Alawi, who is running for the JPA presidency later this month, said he and many fellow journalists have set-up a seven-member defence committee that includes Lower House Deputies Salameh Hiyari, Mahmoud Kharabsheh, Salameh Attieh and other journalists to pursue the case on behalf of Al Arab Al Yawm's employees.

"This sort of a problem worries most journalists and newspaper employees, and we want to make sure it does not happen again," said Alawi.

He told the Jordan Times that the committee will hold a meeting Saturday, and that a sit-in in front of the Parliament building by many journalists was arranged for

Sunday.

"Al Arab Al Yawm has set a precedent in sacking its employees and the JPA council has not taken any tough or adequate measures against that, therefore it is my right as well as that of my fellow journalists to fight it," he added.

According to Momani the daily last December sacked around 16 of its non-journalist employees.

Last February, Hroub also fired the daily's chief editor Saleh Qallab and Taher Adwan, the paper's responsible editor.

Reasons behind the editors' dismissals remain a puzzle to many as well as to the editors themselves, yet speculations centred around personal differences between Qallab and Hroub.

When asked for reasons behind the editors' dismissals, Hroub said it was part of the paper's "internal restructuring process."

Hroub who owns shares in Al Arab Al Yawm, Al Masaiyah, The Arab Daily, and in weeklies Shihani, Al Bilad and Abed Rabbah has been unavailable for comment.

Yeltsin warns of war over Kosovo; new NATO strikes on Good Friday

(Continued from page 1)

Tanjug also reported a total of three daytime detonations southeast and southwest of Pristina, the Kosovo capital. For the first time, no air strikes were reported in Pristina itself overnight.

In a turnaround, NATO acknowledged that earlier this week, one of its bombs from an attack on the main telephone exchange in Pristina fell short of its target, causing damage to a residential area.

"Despite our very best efforts it appears that on this attack one bomb may have caused some collateral damage," Air Commodore David Wilby told reporters during a briefing at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

In Thursday's briefing, Wilby said allied bombing was not responsible for the widespread damage in Pristina, saying this damage was probably orchestrated by the Serbs.

NATO allies have insisted the bombing campaign will continue until Milosevic withdraws Serb special police and Yugoslav army units sent to Kosovo as part of the crackdown.

The allies also say he must also allow all ethnic Albanian refugees to return home and accept a peace plan calling for 28,000 NATO-led troops, including 4,000 Americans, to enforce a peace plan.

NATO's top general, Gen. Klaus Naumann, said Friday it would be "very, very difficult" for the West to impose peace in Kosovo without sending in ground troops.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan called on Yugoslavia to stop all action by military and paramilitary forces and withdraw them from Kosovo.

The call formed part of a five-point programme of commitments to be presented to Belgrade to bring an end to what Annan, in a statement read to reporters in Geneva, called the "tragedy taking place in and around Kosovo."

Milosevic's government claims its crackdown on the independence-minded Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is over and that "peace has prevailed" in Kosovo, a majority Albanian province of Yugoslavia's main republic, Serbia.

The rebels, however, call that a sham.

Yugoslavia is also urging refugees to return — and choked off nearly all border escape routes — but Western officials have voiced fears Milosevic wants to use them as human shields against NATO air strikes.

Nearly a half million ethnic Albanians have fled or were driven out of Kosovo since the NATO bombing campaign began March 24, in Europe's

greatest mass displacement in half a century.

The U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, appeared to have solved the mystery of the 10,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees who went missing on Wednesday, saying they had been located in Macedonia and neighbouring Albania.

Canadian Immigration Minister Lucienne Robillard said UNHCR head Sadako Ogata had decided the UNHCR would not need Western nations to take in Kosovo refugees in an airlift at this time, but this could not immediately be confirmed.

Those reaching refuge in neighbouring states have described a systematic campaign of terror by Serb troops and police against ethnic Albanians, who made up 90 per cent of the Serbian province's pre-war population of two million people.

Britain said more grim reports of atrocities by Yugoslav forces were emerging from Kosovo, including accounts of dead refugees' bodies being burned and buried by the truckload.

In other developments Friday, Yugoslav authorities confirmed they are holding two Australian aid workers who have been missing for more than a week, Australia said. It has demanded their immediate release.

Jordan's ties with Arab states to be based on mutual respect — King

(Continued from page 1)

When asked about the idea of confederation between the Palestinian National Authority and Jordan, which President Arafat referred to recently, the King said: "Jordan maintains open doors for any formula of cooperation with the Palestinians, but this can take place after the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and at the end of the final status negotiations."

In the interview, conducted

at Bab Al Salam Palace by Abdul Bari Arwan, King Abdullah reiterated that Jordan will continue to serve as a supporter of the Palestinians in the final status negotiations with Israel and will place its expertise at their disposal.

King Abdullah said he was looking forward to stronger economic cooperation with the West and was waiting for a meeting of the G7 countries early this summer for its results and resolutions.

The King expressed hope

that these countries will "write off a large portion of Jordan's debts because such a decision will help the Kingdom overcome its present economic crisis."

The King said the coming six months are extremely critical and priority is being given to the economy and how to create jobs and meet the Jordanian people's needs.

In reply to whether the late King Hussein had instructed him to take certain political steps, King Abdullah said: "I

was not fortunate enough to be at my father's side for a very long period of time before his death. But I spent time close to him for more than 20 years and from him I have learnt a great deal. He was a father and a teacher to me. But in his last moments, he told me: 'My son you have a big heart, so follow your heart because it will never let you down'."

Present at the interview was Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabarti.

Prime minister pledges to improve economy, strengthen Arab ties

(Continued from page 1)

Economist Fahed Faneek said Rawabdeh's government is capable of solving the country's economic ills if foreign assistance materialises.

"Depending on our domestic resources our choices will be very few. The government will not be able to face the economic challenges with such resources. Foreign assistance is necessary for the Kingdom," Faneek told the Jordan Times.

The economist and prominent columnist was referring to the promises Jordan received from the United States, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Germany and other countries following the death of King Hussein on Feb. 7.

He said Jordan was likely to receive the financial assistance it was promised from the United States, but he was less optimistic on Jordan's chances of obtaining such aid from the Gulf states.

Faneek said, however, that other forms of assistance that could help the national economy were the opening up of Gulf countries' markets to Jordanian-made products and the employment of more Jordanians in these states.

"Such measures will reduce unemployment, enhance for-

ign reserves and [improve] the balance of payment," Faneek added.

"If the government receives such assistance, I am optimistic that Mr. Rawabdeh's team could do something to overcome the economic plight," he said.

The economic slowdown forced the Kingdom to renew a programme with the International Monetary Fund. Jordan ended a 10-year programme with the IMF in February.

The new three-year programme entails a tight fiscal policy and extensive reforms, including tariff and customs reforms.

Rawabdeh told the House that the government will present the new programme to Parliament for further debate.

"The great challenge that faces us is how to overcome the [economic] problem, and we will do that without frightening our citizens," the premier told lawmakers.

Official figures indicated that one-third of Jordan's 4.6 million population lives below the poverty line while the unemployment rate is officially estimated at 16 per cent and unofficially at up to 27 per cent.

Rawabdeh also said the government will not review the

Political Parties Law, whose introduction last year angered the opposition parties, and said that it will implement the law.

The Political Parties Law, which was endorsed during the government of Abdul Salam Majali, raised the minimum number of party members to 500 and conditioned that each party should be able to win at least one seat in parliamentary elections.

Rawabdeh, who was appointed on March 4, said his government will proceed with earlier plans to build Al Wihdah Dam with Syria, but added that "financial problems" were hindering the project.

Following the death of King Hussein, Jordan and Syria sent clear signals that they wanted better relations, but further improvement hinges on their ability to balance differences over the Middle East peace process and uneasy links with Turkey and Iran.

The two sides have traded scores of emotionally-charged congratulatory cables on various national occasions, indicating that their fractured ties are on the mend.

PKK claims bombing, Iranian carried out attack

ANKARA (AFP) — The rebel Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) on Friday claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on a provincial governor in Turkey carried out by an Iranian.

In a statement carried by the pro-Kurdish news agency, DEM, the PKK said the bomber was a member of its armed wing, the ARGK.

DEM confirmed earlier information from the Turkish army identifying the attacker as a native of Urmieh in northwestern Iran.

The 21st Gendarmerie Division based in Yulsekova, where the attack took place, said the man was named Turab Moushammedi.

Two other Iranians and two Turks involved in the attack were arrested, the statement added. It was the first known involvement of foreigners in the attacks that have hit Turkey since the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in February.

The governor of Hakkari province, Nihat Canbolat, escaped Thursday's attempt on his life with minor injuries, but his driver was killed and nine people, five of them civilians, were injured.

The bomber was ripped to shreds by the explosives tied to his body.

It was the third suicide bombing committed by the PKK in Turkey in less than two weeks. Two people including the attacker were killed and 20 injured in an attack on the governor of Bingol province earlier this week. Eleven were injured in a similar attack in Istanbul in late March, in which the bomber died.

Ankara has frequently accused Iran of "closing its eyes" to the infiltration of PKK fighters into Turkey from its territory, a charge Tehran denies.

PKK leader Ocalan in December said the PKK had opened camps in northern Iran after its bases in Syria and Lebanon were closed. Turkey temporarily closed one of its three border gates with Iran on Feb. 22 and evacuated its consulate in Urmieh after a violent Kurdish demonstration there against the capture of Ocalan in which three people were killed.

Bodybuilder 'admits' taking banned substance

(Continued from page 1)

The president of the Jordan Body Building Federation (JBBF), Abdul Manem Abu Touk, has denied that he has received such a report and also questioned the authenticity of Al Arab Al Yawm's report.

He told the Jordan Times that he contacted Weider on Thursday and expected more information about the issue.

Following his arrival in

Jordan in November, Hassanine received a hero's welcome and met with sport officials headed by then-Minister of Youth and Culture Talal Sata'an Al Hassan and JBBF President Abu Touk.

Hassanine was favoured to clinch the gold medal for Jordan in the upcoming Pan-Arab Games. He will not be allowed to take part in any domestic or international contests if the IFBB proves that he used

banned substances.

Jordan's best achievement in bodybuilding was Hassanine's third place finish in 1994 World Championship held in China.

Last year, Jordan's weightlifting champion Ayed Khawaldeh was disqualified from the Asian Games contests held in Bangkok in December after testing positive. Khawaldeh tested positive after setting a new Arab record in the 56-kilogramme class. The

Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) reprimanded the Jordan Olympic Committee after Khawaldeh was found to have taken the diuretic Triamterene in a random test, following which he was immediately disqualified and expelled from the Games Village.

The OCA handed the matter to the sport's governing body to impose an international suspension which will bar him from the Pan-Arab Games.

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The Evangelical Local Church

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

In Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Moderate to warm weather conditions will prevail with temperatures rising gradually and winds northeasterly to easterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be warm, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

Amman 06/21
Aqaba 18/26

Deserts 05/24

Jordan Valley 14/28

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 18 Aqaba 22. Humidity readings: Amman 43 per cent, Aqaba 32 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 06/15
Jerash 07/19
Um Qays 07/21
Madaba 07/22
Petra 12/27
Dead Sea 06/24

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Farouq Nour 5601719
Dr. Abdul Hadi Tayyem 4620115
Dr. Wissam Hazyin 4748563
Dr. Muthair Al Qaraini 4779999

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004
Ruksa Al Dawa Pharmacy 5336169

IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh (02)250080
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275360

ZARQA:

Dr. Salah Saffarini (05)987565

Palestine Pharmacy (05)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police (02)4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade 4617101
Blood Bank 4775121
Highway Police 5343402
Traffic Police 4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 487487
Amman Municipality Complaints 7871111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 4773111
Radio Jordan 4774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co. 4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199

The Islamic, Abdi 5666131/7

Luzmila 4630195

Khalidi Maternity 4642816

Alkheir Maternity 464241/2

Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362

Malhas, J. Amman 4636140

Palestine, Shmeissani 5607071

Shmeissani Hospital 5607431

Jordan Hospital 5607550

University Hospital 5353444

Al-Munsher Hospital 566727/9

Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhsineen 477101/3

Al-Bashir 4775111/26

Army, Marka 4891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital 5157100

Amal Hospital 5607155

Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000

Jerusalem Hospital 4387181

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital

Zarqa National Hospital

Ibn Sina Hospital (09)96731

Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital

Roman Catholic Hospital

Ibn Al Nafess Hospital

Rosary Sisters Hospital

7102011

Specialty Hospital (02) 7103100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital

tel. (03)2014111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by

Royal Jordanian (RJ) information

department at the Queen Alia

International Airport Tel.

(44)53200 where it should always

be verified. Information on other

flights is obtained on telephone

(44) 52700 or (44) 523250. Infor-

mation on Royal Wings flights can

be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

06:00 Tehran (RJ)

07:45 Damascus (RJ)

08:30 Aqaba (add) (RJ)

09:25 Beirut (RJ)

09:30 New Delhi (RJ)

09:30 Karachi, Dubai (RJ)

09:45 Doha, Bahrain (RJ)

10:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Home News

GAM halts decision to fell trees for Kashef road expansion

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) said on Friday it had suspended a plan to uproot 56 old pine trees to be able to widen a street in a picturesque and hilly area near Amman after a controversy raised by several residents.

The decision crowned a year-old anti-afforestation campaign by several residents of the Kashef area of Badr Al Jadid, near Mahes — 15 kilometres west of Amman — who offered an alternative to the municipality's plan.

"We have halted the process and we will conduct a new study on the matter in order to re-investigate whether the widening of the street is really necessary," Hussein Al Hamouri, director of the Public Relations department at the GAM, told the Jordan Times.

Residents said earlier

this week that 56 pine trees had been marked with colour to prepare for their removal to pave the way for plans to widen the street.

"It is a pity to cut down these beautiful old pine trees... they are irreplaceable," said resident Fayed Jaber, who together with others in the neighbourhood, have been trying to avert the GAM plan.

"Here in Jordan, we need every single tree."

The trees at stake fall inside the boundaries of a land owned by Jaber. "As the land right and left of the street belongs to me, I offered to be flexible and spare the trees by detouring or diverting the street a bit to the left or right," Jaber added.

He said at least 40 of the trees could be spared by a minor diversion and through building an island around the trees — a common practice elsewhere in the capital.

Some Kashef residents

said much of the land in the area belongs to a prominent local tribe, whose members favour widening the street to push up real estate prices.

However, the issue highlighted lack of serious popular awareness on nature conservation, including afforestation.

Salem Al Akur, director of the Forestry and Agricultural Resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, told the Jordan Times this week that he was unaware of the Kashef pine tree issue.

"However, our problem is that the Ministry of Agriculture does not participate in the committees that take decisions to open or to widen streets. These decisions are taken by the Greater Amman Municipality. We wish this system could be changed so that we have the opportunity to participate in this decision-making process."

Theatre festival opens with novel performances

By Dima Hamdan

AMMAN — The 6th Amman International Festival was off to a good start on Thursday, with an impressive number of foreign and local theatre-goers left standing room only at the Royal Cultural Centre.

"We had a great turnout yesterday," Nader Amran, president of Al Fawanees group told the Jordan Times on Friday. He said that at least 700 people attended the first day's performances: an original musical concert and a contemporary choreography.

The festival started with a concert entitled "Oness," composed and performed by the Rum Troupe and the Swedish Backa Theatre Musicians. The theme, as described by a member of Rum, is about the unity of people of different cultures and races, and the harmony within the individual.

Both groups performed a remarkable and appealing combination of authentic Arabic and European tunes, as well as contemporary jazz.

Amran said that the feedback was "very positive."

"The audience was pleased that Rum [which

is a relatively young group] was working with a foreign professional group," he said.

The Backa Theatre have been working for 15 years in rock, jazz, and pop.

Unfortunately, the venue did not have an adequate seating capacity, which caused discomfort to the unexpectedly large crowd.

The Rum Troupe was created by Jordanian composer Tarek Nasser in 1998. Nasser works closely with Arabic directors, including Syrian Najdat Anzour, and composes scores for famous Arabic television dramas.

Switzerland's Alias Dance Group first performed in the festival with a dance entitled "We Can't Hold Our Breath Any Longer."

"We have made it a tradition to present at least two or three choreographies each festival," Amran said. The show was based on the theme of human relations. Two dancers put on an interesting and provocative performance, but their intimate movements seem to have shocked some of the audience who are not accustomed to intimate acting on stage. On the other hand, vibrant music and clever scenography kept

the show intriguing and energetic throughout.

Although the display of sensuality was unusually daring, Amran said the festival is not censored and that he was prepared for the possibility of receiving negative feedback.

"But people in general enjoyed the show," he said, "Only four people left the theatre."

The Swedish Backa Theatre performed "My Dream Dad" on Friday at the Osama Al Mashini Theatre. It is a short choreography between a little girl who wants to play with her father who is too busy reading his newspaper. The play was directed by Eva Bergman, daughter of the renowned director Ingmar Bergman.

"My Dream Dad" will be performed again on Saturday. Theatre Organique and Al Hamra, both Tunisian, will also begin their joint performance on Saturday with "Love in Autumn," a play about a female surgeon accused of harming a young patient.

The theatre festival is organised by Al Fawanees in cooperation with Al Warsha Theatre of Egypt.

Jordanian men sweep Dead Sea ultra marathon

By Susan Resheq

AMMAN — Over 250 runners participated in the 7th Annual Amman-Dead Sea Ultra Marathon on Friday to raise funds for patients suffering from neurological diseases.

The 50-kilometre charity marathon was organised by the Amman Road Runners for the benefit of the Society for the Care of Neurological Patients and was held under the patronage of HRH Prince Firas Ben Ra'ad — His Majesty King Abdullah's adviser for health affairs — who is the president of the society which has so far spent more than JD61,480 on neurological patients.

"As the marathon participants increased it was thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to raise money for the charity and encourage more national and international runners to take part," said Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji, who attended the marathon.

"We should think first of mental health; it is the most important thing," Biltaji said. Runners kicked off the jaunt from the Seventh Circle

in Amman at 6:30 a.m. on their way to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth.

As runners descended towards their final destination temperatures rose, soaring from 14°C in Amman at 900 metres above sea level, to an average of 33°C at 400 metres below sea level.

"It was very cold in the morning in Amman but we warmed up as we ran. There was also an increase in temperature as we headed to the Dead Sea," said Masoud Daoudi, one of the marathon participants. "I have really enjoyed the run."

Runners were supplied with water every four kilometres. The ultra marathon included 120 Jordanian participants, 45 Americans, 35 Britons and 35 other runners from various countries.

An American participant told the Jordan Times, "It is such an excellent idea to hold such a charity marathon. This will encourage runners from many countries to participate as they will have the chance to run to the lowest point on earth and help needy people."

"Many people have come here to participate. They even brought children with them who wanted to run. This has

encouraged us to hold this marathon every year, and the number of participants has increased yearly. So, we hope the number of participants will reach 2,000 in the coming years," said Reem Farkouh, the Amman Road Runners representative.

"All revenues of the ultra marathon will be given to the Society for the Care of Neurological Patients in order to reach needed people," said Rafiq Hamameh from the society and one of the organisers.

Prince Firas and Biltaji have awarded the winners prizes, most of which went to Jordanians.

Several Jordan-based leading enterprises, including LG Electronics, Fastlink, and the Dead Sea Movenpick Hotel sponsored the charity event.

Jordanian Salameh Abdul Karim won the men's 50k, while Valerie LeCran from Brunei won the women's. In the 42k run, Jordanian Khaled Sheikh won the men's run, and Jansen Nayeef, a British national, won the women's.

Court sentences man to death for murder of JVA official

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Criminal Court last week sentenced a 41-year-old man to death after he was found guilty of murdering his boss in Deir Alla in November 1998.

The court tribunal found Mohammad Abed, an employee of the Jordan Valley Authority, guilty of murdering Mohammad Habashneh, 48, the assistant to the secretary general of the JVA in his office on Nov. 7.

The same tribunal acquitted a second defendant, Hussein Khatib, of a charge of complicity in premeditated murder, "because of a lack of evidence."

Both defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges in their opening trial in January.

According to court documents, Abed was dismissed from his job upon Habashneh's recommendations, because "the defendant was

not disciplined in his job and used to initiate problems with his fellow employees."

"Because of his poor performance and his repeated violations, the victim transferred him to different departments, and finally recommended that he be dismissed from his job," the charge sheet said.

Abed decided to take revenge, and planned to kill Habashneh, it added.

On the morning of the incident, the charge sheet said, Abed asked his nephew to drive him to the Jordan Valley.

"The defendant entered Habashneh's office, and without saying a word, shot him four times, and left with Mahmoud who was waiting for him in the car," the charge sheet said.

The verdict, handed down by Judges Mohammad Ajameh, Mufleh Mubaidin and Issa Hamdan, will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation within 30 days.

Deputies head for IPU meeting

AMMAN (Petra) — A Jordanian parliamentary delegation led by the Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Abdul Hadi Majali left Friday for Brussels to take part in the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) meeting due to open Saturday with the participation of nearly 136 nations.

In a statement before his departure, Majali said the meeting will focus attention on social and political issues plaguing the world as well human rights and democracy issue.

Majali said he will focus attention in particular on the political and economic developments in the Middle East and the world at large from a Jordanian perspective and will

review stand on the Middle East peace process and the Kingdom's continued efforts to contribute to just and durable peace.

The address will urge the IPU to promote its role in enabling the U.N. to ensure the implementation of resolutions concerning democracy, public freedoms and world peace, according to Majali.

Majali said he will hold side meetings with heads of Arab and foreign parliamentary delegations to explore further cooperation in Middle East peace building. He also said the Jordanian delegation will participate in separate meetings with the Arab parliamentary delegations to coordinate the Arab countries stands.

'We have no political differences with Syria' — Batikhi

AMMAN (J.T.) — The head of the General Intelligence Department, in an unprecedented newspaper interview, said Jordan has no political differences with Syria and is looking forward to strengthening bilateral ties with its northern neighbour.

"We do not consider ourselves as having a political difference with Syria," Samih Batikhi was quoted as saying in an interview with the Saudi Arabian daily Ukuq on Wednesday and reprinted by the local daily Al Aswaq on Thursday.

"But as a matter of fact, Syria at a certain stage in time considered that there was a political difference (with Jordan) over the ... peace treaty with Israel," he added in his first interview with a newspaper since he took office in 1994.

"But at the same time, Syria had distinguished ties with Egypt after the signing of Camp David peace treaty with Israel (in 1979) and we used to ask as to the cause for the estrangement in (Jordanian-Syrian) ties."

Officials said recent Jordanian-Syrian gestures of goodwill following the death of His Majesty King Hussein indicate that fractured bilateral

ties are on the mend after they hit a record low following the signing of Jordan's own 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

Syrian President Hafez Al Assad made a surprise visit to Jordan to attend the funeral of King Hussein on Feb. 8, set

'We look forward to an era of brotherly ties. We also hope to see the end of complications connected with security issues'

ting foot in Amman for the first time since 1994.

He also sent his son, Bashar, being groomed to run Syria in the future — to meet His Majesty King Abdullah and to condole him over the death of his father who ruled Jordan for 47 years.



Her Majesty Queen Rania holding hands with ethnic Albanian refugee children in this refugee camp outside Skopje on Thursday. Queen Rania travelled with a planeload of aid for refugees who fled the Kosovo crisis (Photo by Reuters)

Queen returns from Kosovo aid mission

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Her Majesty Queen Rania returned home late on Thursday after supervising the distribution of a plane load of relief supplies sent by Jordan to aid ethnic Albanian refugees fleeing Yugoslavia's war-torn Kosovo province.

In first official foray abroad since she was proclaimed Queen on March 21, Her Majesty spoke of the suffering refugees and the dire need to help them.

"Our visit was not to express any political stand or to support one party against the other," she told journalists after arriving in Amman. "The visit aimed at helping those subjected to the worst treatment."

"I saw the catastrophic situation there... Women

who have become widows, children who have lost their parents and those who are in dire need of medical help. Our duty is to stand by them."

The Hashemite Charitable Organisation for the Kosovo crisis victims, which gathered the aid in implementation of His Majesty King Abdullah's directives, said it was planning to send more assistance.

Queen Rania received the C-130 cargo plane laden with 18,000 tonnes of medical supplies, biscuits, baby milk, blankets and tents at Skopje airport in Macedonia, where many Kosovars have fled.

The aid, worth \$180,000, was donated by individuals and charities.

Religious Affairs Minister

Abdul Salam Abbadi, HRH Prince Ali and HRH Prince Talal were also aboard the plane.

Abbadi said the shipment was the first of several planned for Kosovo refugees in the coming weeks.

"This aid is an expression of support for the people of Kosovo in the tragedy caused by the aggression and practices of the Serbian forces," Abbadi said.

Jordan earlier recalled its envoy to Yugoslavia in protest of Serb killings in Kosovo and the expulsion of ethnic Albanians.

Many of the 200,000 or so ethnic Albanian refugees on the move are in or heading to Macedonia and Albania.

APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE

The Batikhi family

extends its appreciation and gratitude to their excellencies, the heads and members of the foreign diplomatic corps in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for expressing their sympathy over the passing of

Tayseer Batikhi

Your condolences have been of great comfort to us in our bereavement.

What's Going On

AMMAN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

- "Backa" Theatre Production, "Children and Youth" at Osama Machini Theatre at 6:00 p.m.
- Workshop entitled "Technical Elements in the Theatre" at the Royal Cultural Centre (10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.). (The workshop will continue on Sunday 11 April 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.).
- Workshop entitled "Creative Writing for Theatre" by Lena Verza Findell at Tyche Hotel (10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.).
- "Love in Autumn" (in Arabic) at the Royal Cultural Centre at 9:00 p.m.

SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDY

- Shakespeare's comedy "Kings and Clowns" at the Inter-Continental Hotel on Sunday and Monday April 11-12 at 8:30 p.m.

LECTURE

- Museums and Art in Jordan: A Personal Journey by Dr. Carol Malt at Darat Al Funun, Jabel Weibdeh at 6:00 p.m.

Li-Sharif talks build on close Pakistan-China ties

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — China's number two leader Li Peng held talks with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif here Friday on cooperation between their closely allied countries, officials said.

Sources said the talks, which lasted more than an hour, covered economic, political and regional and international issues and matters relating to peace and regional security.

Representatives of the two later signed agreements to promote bilateral cooperation but details were not given.

Sharif later hosted a lunch for Li who was also scheduled to call on President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar, officials said.

Li, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC), arrived Thursday for a visit that officials said forms part of high level exchanges between mainly Muslim Pakistan and Communist China, who have shared years of cooperation in economic and defence related areas.

They said the visit was important as it followed nuclear tests by Pakistan last May, in response to

similar detonations by rival India.

China has provided Pakistan with a 300 megawatt nuclear power plant and its collaboration has helped Pakistan in manufacturing Super-7 fighter aircraft and battle tanks.

Li, who pledged on arrival that China would further cement relations with Pakistan despite the changing international situation and make new contributions for peace and stability in the region.

China will take "all round cooperation to a new level," he said in a speech at a dinner hosted by Pakistani National Assembly's Speaker Elahi Bakhsh Soomro.

"China will remain a trustworthy friend of Pakistan no matter what changes may take place in the regional and international situation," Li said.

"We will further strengthen our cooperation with Pakistan in international affairs, and make new contributions to peace and stability in our region and the world at large," he said.

"The profound changes in the international situation have brought us both

precious opportunities and serious challenges.

"Both being developing nations, China and Pakistan are faced with an arduous task of maintaining stability, developing the economy and improving people's living standards," the Chinese leader said.

Li, a former premier and still number two in the Beijing hierarchy behind President Jiang Zemin, arrived from Damascus on a five-day visit.

Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz and Senate chairman Wasim Sajjad will meet the Chinese parliamentary chief on Saturday, officials said.

"China and Pakistan enjoy time-tested and friction-free relations," Information Minister Mushahid Hussain said. The visit will provide a "solid and substantive basis" to further cement friendship, he said on the eve of Li's visit.

Sharif visited China last year and Chinese Defence Minister General Chi Haotian visited Pakistan in February to reassure China's cooperation to Pakistan in maintaining a strategic balance.



Chairman of China's National People's Congress Li Peng (centre) walks with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (right) in Islamabad April 9. Li Peng held talks with Premier Sharif, focusing on regional and bilateral issues (Reuters photo)

China human rights boss defends Tiananmen killings

BEIJING (R) — The head of a Chinese government-backed human rights body on Friday defended Beijing's 1989 crackdown on mass pro-democracy demonstrations, calling the protesters "flies and mosquitoes" who had bitten the government.

"We forgot to prepare flyswatters," said Zhu Muzhi, president of the China Society for Human Rights Studies, referring to the lack of rubber bullets, tear gas and other riot gear to quell the demonstrations.

The student-led protests centred on Beijing's Tiananmen Square were crushed by army tanks backed by troops with machine-guns on June 4, 1989. Hundreds died and many were jailed.

Zhu, who had served as a government spokesman after the crackdown, said he saw rioters pelt rocks at soldiers who did not fight back and set fire to an army truck.

"One soldier was thrown off a bridge," said Zhu, also a former minister of culture and president of the state news agency Xinhua. "The mob chased (him) down and

killed him." Zhu said the government had been patient but was "forced to shoot demonstrators in the end."

"We were bitten," Zhu said. "There was a boil. There was no other way but to have it surgically removed."

"Facts prove that the method used in the past cured the disease. It is not necessary to rethink whether another method could have been used," he said.

Zhu said that if the protests had not been crushed, China would have plunged into turmoil. "The people would have stood up," he said. "The past 10 years would not have been easy to pass by."

Police have constantly harassed bereaved families, demonstrators who had been wounded and pro-democracy activists campaigning for a reassessment of the crackdown.

Zhu said the protests aimed to overthrow the government, not merely denounce widespread corruption and galloping inflation.

The 1989 protests are offi-

cially labelled a counter-revolutionary rebellion aimed at toppling the government.

Zhu, who still enjoys privileges accorded a cabinet minister, blamed the demonstrations on former Communist Party General Secretaries Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang.

Hu died on April 15, 1989, triggering the protests. He had been purged in 1987 by Communist hardliners, accused of failing to check the spread of "bourgeois liberalisation" — Communist jargon for Western political ideas.

Zhu was sacked in 1989 for sympathising with student demonstrators. He lives under virtual arrest in Beijing.

Last month, Zhao's former secretary, Bao Tong, the most senior official to be jailed over the crackdown, called for Beijing to reverse its "wrongful assessment" of the protests.

Zhu said China's human rights record was not perfect, but that in a country of 1.2 billion people the right to survive prevailed over political rights in the minds of the masses.

Namibia auctions first ivory since 1989 ban

WINDHOEK, Namibia (AP) — Fourteen Japanese buyers gathered at a country club here Friday to bid on 13.8 tonnes of elephant tusks in the first legal sale of ivory since an international ban imposed in 1989.

The one-time sale is the first by Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, which were granted permission Feb. 12 by a U.N. body to dispose of elephant tusk stockpiles. The go-ahead by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) provoked criticism by some conservationists, who fear the sale would promote poaching.

The ivory ban was imposed to help stem the slaughter of elephants, which suffered declining populations in some parts of Africa.

The Namibian auction will be followed by auctions involving 59 tonnes next week in the other two countries.

The ban will remain in effect after the sales, said Jim Armstrong, deputy secretary-general of Geneva-based CITES.

Armstrong said that if there is any evidence in an upsurge in poaching because of the sale, future such auctions would be ruled out.

The ivory here was up for auction in 500-kilogramme lots. It comes from natural deaths and the culling of problem animals only, said Malan Lindeque, the environment ministry's chief elephant expert.

Nearly every tusk sold can be traced to individual elephants that died over the last 15 years. Another 28 tonnes of ivory confiscated from poachers and smugglers remain under lock and key in a government vault elsewhere in Windhoek. Lindeque declined to comment on the potential value of the ivory stockpile, but at the time of the ban, ivory was selling for \$300 per kilogramme.

On Thursday, the Japanese buyers inspected the lots. Most of the 14 buyers represent traditional "hanko" carving businesses in Japan, which create elaborate signature seals from the malleable ivory for wealthy clients. Japan is the leading consumer of ivory.

The ban has hit the traditional Japanese industry hard, and the shortage of ivory has put many of them out of business, said Tamiotsu Ishibashi, president of the Japan Federation of Ivory Arts and Crafts Association.

"This is what we do for a living. We have no other business," he said. "The ban has affected us. We have lost more than 50 per cent of traditional carvers from the industry since the ban," he said.

According to the CITES decision, revenue generated from the sale must be ploughed back into conservation measures. The three countries also had to meet strict guidelines on anti-poaching and control of the ivory.

Armstrong said CITES was assisting other countries like Kenya and Tanzania to find donors willing to sponsor the disposal of valuable stockpiles to non-commercial institutions like museums.

"They can burn it, bury it, stick it in a museum, but may not sell it for any commercial purposes like carving."

Africa's elephant herds are estimated to have declined from about 1.3 million in 1975 to about 650,000 at present.

Selling ivory, even under strictly controlled conditions, sends the wrong signal to the black market, especially in a politically and economically unstable Africa, conservationists say.

NEWS IN BRIEF

11 held in Sri Lanka's biggest kidnapping for ransom case

COLOMBO (AP) — A police officer and 10 others were arrested and most of the ransom money was recovered in Sri Lanka's biggest kidnapping for ransom case, police said Friday. A police officer, three military deserters and seven others have been arrested in the past week and 17 million rupees (\$261,000) recovered in the March 30 kidnapping of a company director. The director was released a day later when his wife paid the ransom money, said police officer Nuwan Wedasinghe. The kidnappers, who included a police officer, stopped G.C. Wickremasinghe's vehicle at Colombo's posh golf club and took him and the driver to a hide-out in the suburbs. They then called the director's wife and threatened to kill him if she did not pay the ransom. They released his driver later. The wife raised money through her relatives and paid the ransom later. She then alerted the police. The family also gave police the number on the currency notes they paid as ransom. Police informed all banks about the numbers. Earlier this week, a bank manager near Colombo noticed a deposit made with the same notes and called the police. The man was arrested and following information given by him all the others were held.

Japanese navy officer found hanged after exam scandal

TOKYO (AFP) — The Japanese navy found a senior officer hanged on a warship on Friday, officials said, as the military prepared to investigate a promotion examinations scandal. The officer of the Maritime Self-Defence Force was found hanging early Friday in a helicopter hanger on the escort vessel Sawayuki, now anchored at the port of the northern Japan city of Mutsu, a spokesman said. The officer was unconscious at the scene but died at a hospital later. He apparently "committed suicide," the spokesman said, adding the force was yet to find the motive. "We also refrain from disclosing the officer's name by considering his bereaved family's feelings," he said. The suicide came on the eve of the launch of an investigation committee on suspected wrongdoings at last month's promotion tests in which the dead officer served as an examiner. "Several senior officers are suspected of having tipped off correct answers to subordinates at the examinations," the spokesman said.

South African who shot gorilla gets 40 years

JOHANNESBURG (R) — A South African man who shot a gorilla while fleeing from police has been sentenced to 40 years in prison. South African radio said on Friday. Max the gorilla, a star attraction at Johannesburg zoo, became a folk hero in crime-ridden South Africa in July 1997 after he helped police to capture Isaac Mofokeng. Mofokeng ran blindly into Max's den while being pursued by police after he tried to break into a nearby home. Max pinned the fugitive against the wall of his enclosure and kept guard even after Mofokeng shot him in the chest. During his trial, Mofokeng said Max had bitten him on the buttocks. "I thought my last hour had come," he said. Mofokeng, a former policeman, was found guilty on 10 of the 11 charges he faced for various crimes, including rape and housebreaking, the South African broadcasting corporation said. His 40-year prison sentence included five years for malicious injury to the gorilla.

One dies in bitter battle between student organisations

KARACHI (AP) — Students armed with chains, broken bottles and iron rods fought a bitter battle at Karachi University Friday killing one student and injuring several others, police said. They said members of rival student organisations fought for about 45 minutes, before police and university security guards intervened. Classes were temporarily suspended. One student died after being beaten with an iron rod, police said. Police are conducting an investigation, and so far say they do not know what caused the fight involving members of the Islamic conservative Islami Jamiat-e-Tulabai and the Punjabi Student Association. More than 10,000 students are enrolled at Karachi University located on the northern edge of the city.

Protest demonstration spins out of control, killing 2 policemen

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — A protest demonstration spun out of control Friday leaving two policemen dead and six other policemen seriously injured, officials said. They said hundreds of people organised a protest in Michni, some 25 kilometres west of Peshawar, to protest a government decision to amalgamate their remote region with a nearby municipality. Several of the protesters were armed and when police tried to break up the demonstration they apparently opened fire on police, police officials said. There were reports of return fire from the police, but it was not immediately clear whether any of the demonstrators were killed or injured. The protest began after the government announced it would amalgamate 44 villages in remote northeastern Pakistan with nearby Charsadda district. Previously these villages were aligned to the tribal region of Pakistan, an area where tribal law is supreme. The government of Pakistan's authority often is challenged in the tribal region and generally loses out to tribal authority. In the tribal belt most people are heavily armed and laws are made and enforced according to the dictates of tribal elders. Police said they were investigating the shooting incident, but so far there were no reports of arrests having been made.

Separatist group in southern Thailand blamed for explosion

BANGKOK (AP) — An explosion outside a shop in Thailand on Friday was the work of Muslim separatists, a TV station reported. No injuries were reported. An extortion letter found at the site of the blast in Channe Narathiwat province, 1,140 kilometres south of Bangkok, was signed by two leading members of the New Pulo, a separatist group active in Thailand's four southernmost provinces, the report by ITV said. It reported that police found the letter, which threatened the shop owner with death if he did not pay 300,000 baht (\$8,020). The explosion did minor damage to the shop's gate and a building across the street, ITV reported. Several small groups in southern Thailand engage in sporadic terrorism, ostensibly in support of Malay separatism. Thailand's four southernmost provinces have a Muslim, mostly Malay, majority while the rest of the country is overwhelmingly Buddhist.

Russian journalist says he doesn't expect fair trial

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia (AP) — A Russian military journalist accused of revealing secrets about Russia's navy said Friday he believed that the trial against him was being rigged by people intent on keeping him behind bars.

Naval Capt. Grigory Pasko is charged with treason and espionage and could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted, but details of the precise charges have not been made public.

The case is being heard in secret by the navy's Pacific Fleet court in the eastern port city of Vladivostok.

"I am not expecting that the trial will be fair," Pasko said before a court session Friday, according to the Interfax news agency.

"Everything indicates that it will be a sham, not a proper trial. The true criminals are at large, doing everything to prevent me from being released, even though there is every reason for that," Pasko said.

Pasko, a reporter for the Pacific

Fleet newspaper Boyevaya Vakhita (combat vigil), did freelance work for a Japanese television station, NHK, providing information about waste dumping by the Pacific Fleet.

He was arrested in Vladivostok in 1997, and has been imprisoned since then. Prosecutors have only said he divulged information about the combat readiness of the fleet.

Pasko's lawyers have repeatedly claimed he was charged in revenge for exposing environmental damage inflicted by the fleet.

Defence lawyers said Thursday that they are considering cutting down their witness list because testimony made by more than 20 witnesses from the prosecutor's side wasn't substantive enough to counter.

The court has decided to call three Japanese journalists to testify in Pasko's trial, but defence lawyer Oleg Kodiyarov said Friday they were unlikely to come to Russia to appear in court, Interfax reported.

Malaysia says viral outbreak contained

KUALA LUMPUR (AP) — Malaysia announced Friday that it has contained a deadly viral outbreak that claimed the lives of more than 100 people and crippled its once-prosperous hog industry.

But even as Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who heads the viral task force, announced that the virus had been contained, there were conflicting reports on the number of deaths it caused.

Abdullah said the two suspected killer viruses believed to spread from pigs to humans were no longer wreaking havoc in the central state of Negeri Sembilan and several other parts of the country.

"It can be said that we have achieved success and the outbreak has been contained," he told reporters at a press conference that was closed to the foreign news media.

On Friday, the government also banned the transport of pigs across state borders to prevent infected

hogs from spreading the viruses. So far, soldiers have destroyed more than 700,000 pigs out of a targeted 1 million.

The unprecedented six-month viral outbreak has thrown the southeast Asian nation into confusion. Pig farmers abandoned their homes in February after health officials warned that they could be bitten by the culex mosquito, which carries the Japanese encephalitis virus, originally thought to be the culprit.

Weeks later, however, local researchers, with the help of the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, isolated a previously undetected virus found to be far deadlier than Japanese encephalitis.

Symptoms are the same: high fever, aches, eventual coma and death. CDC spokesman Tom Skinner told the Associated Press on Thursday that the virus had never been seen before and that researchers were still struggling with a

means to treat its victims.

In Manila, the regional office of the World Health Organisation said that based on human cases under treatment, the incubation period for the virus ranges from four to 18 days, with the first symptom being a severe headache.

Workers in piggeries and abattoirs are highly at risk, but there is so far no evidence of transmission from person to person or from eating cooked pork, the WHO regional office said in a statement Friday.

It said that there have been 11 confirmed cases, including one death, in Singapore. All the victims were abattoir workers who had contact with pigs from Malaysia.

The mysterious virus, which resembles the very rare hendra virus first detected in Australia in 1994, has claimed more than two-thirds of the total number of victims — a figure which is also in dispute.

Thursday's weekly report

by the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said 111 Malaysians have been killed by the viral outbreak, while news reports said there were as many as 117 deaths.

The tally on the government's official 24-hour hot line remains 92, far below the estimates by the cdc, which has sent nine scientists here to assist local health officials.

Also Friday, the veterinary department said it sent 1,400 blood samples from horses belonging to the Malaysian racing association to the Australian animal house laboratory in geelong, Australia for screening.

If the horses are infected, they may have to be destroyed, said the department's director-general, Mohd Nordin Mohd Nor.

The department has banned all movement of horses and directed all establishments and individuals to screen all horses for the hendra-like virus.



CONTRACT KILLING — Police officers stand around the body of Gennady Tuganov, a nationalist politician who was gunned down in an apparent contract killing in St. Petersburg on Friday, according to a news report. Tuganov, who ran the St. Petersburg branch of the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party, was shot eight times in the head as he entered his apartment, the Interfax news agency said. He died on the spot. Officials with LDP were quoted by Interfax as saying that the killing was probably a contract hit aimed at stopping Tuganov's 'political and public activities.' Police were investigating the case, but so far no suspects have been found. Scores of gangland assassinations are reported across Russia every year, but the killers usually escape and authorities rarely make any progress in the cases. St. Petersburg has grown into a particularly crime-ridden city even by Russian standards in recent months, with a number of apparent contract hits against business people and politicians (Reuters photo)

Indianapolis men protest treatment in Zimbabwe prison

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Three Americans arrested on allegations of spying, terrorism and sabotage are being held alone in windowless cells and are forced to sleep naked, shackled in leg irons, under continuous electric lighting, their lawyer said Friday.

Attorney Jeremy Callow said the three Indianapolis men, arrested on weapons charges March 7 at Harare's main airport, also were denied daily exercise in the yard at Chikurubi maximum security prison.

"Such circumstances constitute unlawful solitary confinement and punishment," Callow told Harare magistrate Weston Nyamwanza. He said prison conditions endured by John Lamonte Dixon, 39, Gary George Blanchard, 34, and Joseph Wendell Pettijohn, 35, were "inhuman and degrading" and breached Zimbabwe's constitutional provisions on rights of prisoners awaiting

trial. Zimbabwean authorities allege the men spied on Congolese forces and their allies, including Zimbabwe troops, fighting against rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda in the 8-month Congo civil war.

Saying they are missionaries of the Indianapolis-based Harvestfield Ministries Church, the Americans admit possessing a stash of weapons, including pump-action shotguns, rifles, telescopic sights and an array of handguns and silencers.

They deny allegations they spied or were planning sabotage and assassinations in Congo and Zimbabwe and insist the guns were for self-defence, hunting and were fired for fun.

Callow said protests over their prison conditions so far were ignored by authorities and he will next week ask the nation's highest court, the supreme court, to intervene if those conditions are

not eased. Nyamwanza noted the complaints and remanded the three to reappear in court April 23.

Callow said the men were allowed to speak only with the prison chaplain or their lawyer. The largest of the three cells was 4.5 metres by 1.5 metres and each was lit around the clock, leading to disorientation. The men's wrist watches had been confiscated.

Prison authorities and police also failed to arrange a lineup of interrogating officers enabling the three to pick out officers they allege tortured them.

A defence request for the lineup was granted by another magistrate on March 26.

The men allege they were beaten on the soles of their feet, assaulted and subjected to electric shocks and near-suffocation torture for six days after their arrest.

In an expanded document

alleging torture submitted to the court on Friday, Blanchard testified he was also made to remove his trousers and act as if having sex with his wife. He was told his wife would be brought to Zimbabwe and "cut open."

Pettijohn said interrogators threatened to gouge out his eyes, shoot him or hand him over to the Congolese government, making a phone call in his presence arranging a flight to Congo.

As a result, he made a false admission, he said in written testimony.

He was further told Blanchard and Dixon were in "the deep freeze" and assumed they had been killed. One of the interrogators told him: "I hate white men. They killed my father."

The Americans face a maximum penalty of life imprisonment on weapons possession charges alone.

Parliament puts off final decision on Yeltsin impeachment

MOSCOW (AP) — Parliament on Friday put off a final decision on when to open an impeachment debate against President Boris Yeltsin, which is tentatively set to begin April 15.

Gennady Seleznyov, the speaker of parliament's lower house, told lawmakers that Yeltsin suggested on Friday that the impeachment debate be delayed. But Yeltsin spokesman Dmitry Yakushkin countered the claim, saying the president does not want the impeachment vote postponed.

Pro-government lawmakers proposed delaying the impeachment debate, set to start next Thursday.

But parliament, dominated by hardliners bent on Yeltsin's ouster, decided that it needed more time to consider the issue and will vote next week on whether to delay an impeachment debate.

The impeachment motion is considered a long-shot,

but Yeltsin's frequent illnesses and Russia's economic crisis have weakened his power and made his ouster more likely than it once was.

The motion must win a two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament and approval by Russia's highest courts. The upper house, the Federation Council, has been more supportive of Yeltsin in the past than the lower house.

A Duma panel has charged Yeltsin with instigating the 1991 Soviet collapse, improperly using force against hard-line lawmakers in 1993, launching a botched war in Chechnya, bringing the nation's military to ruin and waging genocide against the Russian people by pursuing economic policies that impoverished the country.

The charges were initiated by the Communists and other hardliners, but the Liberal Yabloko Faction said it would back

impeachment on one count — launching the 1994-96 war in Chechnya.

Yeltsin said on Friday that he wasn't going to introduce an state of emergency, ban the Communist party or fire Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov — all rumours that had been circulating in parliament on Friday.

"We can't ban the Communist Party," Yeltsin said in the Kremlin. "This will backfire, because Russian people are quick to feel pity for victims of oppression." He also denied that his meeting on Thursday with former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin signalled a plan to bring him back to replace Primakov.

"Don't believe these rumours about my plans to fire Primakov," he said. "It's nothing but the speculation and rumour. I believe that Primakov is useful at this stage, and later we shall see." Yeltsin also used the occasion to try to convince

the regional leaders, who are all members of the parliament's upper house, to fire Prosecutor General Yuri Skuratov when they debate his resignation again on April 21.

Skuratov has been investigating alleged Kremlin corruption, and Yeltsin tried to fire him in February. The upper house refused to sanction the ouster at the time.

State television ran a video that showed a man who appeared to be Skuratov having sex with two women identified as prostitutes. Yeltsin then suspended Skuratov, who submitted his resignation a second time. The house must again decide whether to accept it.

"It's a shame and disgrace for Russia to have such a prosecutor," Yeltsin said. "You must take a clear position to put an end to this scandal. You mustn't act like last time ... when you failed to support the president."

India's embattled Hindu nationalists court allies

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's ruling Hindu nationalists on Friday wooed minor opposition groups in a desperate bid to cling to power, as cracks grew in their fragile coalition government.

Officials said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP party was trying to lure at least three small parties — with 15 seats between them — into supporting the coalition in the event of a no-confidence vote in parliament.

Vajpayee's 13-month-old multi-party coalition has barely 280 members in the 545-seat parliament. It will lose its tenuous majority if a key ally — the AIADMK with 18 MPs — quits the alliance next week as widely expected.

The AIADMK, the second largest member in the ruling coalition, has already withdrawn its ministers from the cabinet and on Friday went a step further by pulling out of the coalition's coordination committee.

In a statement, the AIADMK said it would work towards providing India with "a government

that is both just and effective in the shortest possible time."

Referring to the influence of Hindu fundamentalist groups on the government, the statement said Vajpayee's BJP had failed to escape "the dark shadow of hardliners who sought to take India back to the medieval period."

Significantly, however, the statement stopped short of announcing the party's total withdrawal of support for the coalition.

The DMK, another regional party with six members of parliament, admitted Friday that BJP strategists had approached its leaders for support.

The DMK's Murali Maran, however, refused to give details. He also declined to predict the outcome of the battle of wits raging between the ruling coalition and opposition.

"We don't know whether it will be a Greek tragedy or (have) a happy ending," Maran said. "Why should we say anything which can strengthen the bargaining position of some political leaders?"

BJP officials said they were also talking to the INDL regional party which boasts only four seats and quit the coalition three months ago.

Senior BJP leader Madan Lal Khurana said on Friday he was hopeful of a "positive" response from the INDL, although he admitted that two approaches had so far failed to yield any concrete commitment.

Meanwhile, BJP spokesman J.P. Mathur tried a new tack in his party's war of words with the opposition Congress, warning that a fresh coalition made up of opposition parties would spell economic ruin.

"If our opponents succeed, they won't be able to manage the situation," Mathur said. "The economic stability and progress we gave to the nation will be in doubt."

A.B. Bardhan, chief of the Communist Party of India, told AFP his party was prepared to support a Congress-led government to replace Vajpayee's administration.

"The government is on its way out. The fall is imminent. We have to work out

the contours of an alternative government so that the country is not subjected to expensive mid-term elections" he said.

The Congress and the Communists have a traditionally adversarial relationship but their mutual antipathy for Vajpayee's Hindu-nationalist BJP party has proved a stronger binding force.

Bardhan's statement came three days after India's main communist party — the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) — announced its backing for a Congress bid for power.

CPI-M leader Harkishan Singh Surjeet is widely believed to be helping Congress coordinate its strategy for the coming months.

The Asian Age daily on Friday quoted an unidentified top civil servant who scoffed at the government's continued show of bravado in the face of the deepening crisis.

"It's exactly like when the Titanic was hit by an iceberg. The plates are all laid out, the crockery is on the table," he said.

At least two reported dead as fresh rioting breaks out in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — At least two people were reportedly killed in a fresh outbreak of riots between Christians and Muslims on Friday in eastern Indonesia.

One person was killed in the town of Amahai on Seram island and the other died in Tual city on Kei Kecil island, according to local police and the official Antara news agency.

Both areas are located in Maluku province, some 2,800 kilometres east of Jakarta, the Indonesian

capital. In Tual, a man disembarking from a ship was beheaded, while another man was severely injured, local police said.

The cause of death in the other killing was not immediately known.

Meanwhile, Antara reported at least 12 partially decomposed bodies of people believed to have been killed last week were found in a village on Kei Kecil island.

The death toll from the unrest in southern Maluku

which began late last month now totals at least 103 people. The troubled district is part of an area once known as the Spice Islands which has been hit by a wave of religious rioting since January.

The centre of the violence has been in the provincial capital of Ambon, where at least 200 people have died. The military has sent about 6,000 troops to the province, one-sixth of which were dispatched to Southeast Maluku.

Religious and ethnic tensions, economic hardship and disputes over the course of Indonesia's transition to democracy have fuelled the unrest since the downfall last May of authoritarian President Suharto.

More than 200 people have been killed in a separate bout of ethnic violence which erupted last month in west Kalimantan, an Indonesian province on the island of Borneo. Indigenous Malay and Dayak people attacked

migrants from the island of Madura.

In Jakarta on Friday, the provincial Governor Aspar Aspin blamed the unrest on the Madurese community. Aspin, who met with President B.J. Habibie, urged migrants from Madura island off Eastern Java to adapt to traditions of the local Malay and Dayak peoples.

The Madurese were resettled in Borneo by the government to reduce overcrowding on other Indonesian islands.

Worries about race for millennium baby in Britain

LONDON (AFP) — British nurses and church authorities expressed concern Friday about an unofficial race among couples here to produce the first baby of the new millennium.

The warning came on the eve of the day on which experts predict births which will take place Jan. 1, 2000, are most likely to be conceived.

Consultants are worried that a rash of heavily-pregnant women in hospitals over the end of year holiday season could be a recipe for disaster, with skeleton staff in hospitals unable to cope with the number of women in labour.

Women's health adviser for the Royal College of Nursing, Vicky Allanach, said: "It could cause a lot of problems on the night."

"We are already overstretched and have shortages of both nurses and midwives."

"We have got enough unplanned pregnancies in this country. The decision shouldn't be taken because there is a cash incentive."

The Church of England, meanwhile, condemned what it termed a media "hype" and said it was worried at the lengths that couples would go to in a bid to get the glare of publicity. "How far will this go?"

Will women who sign up to TV companies and sponsors be asked to have a caesarean to make sure they have their baby on January 1?" a church spokeswoman asked.

Family planning experts, for their part, warned that the chances of being able to time a birth to an exact date were very slim.

A spokeswoman for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service said that even a fertile couple who had sex Saturday at a fertile time in a woman's cycle only stood a one in four chance of conceiving, and 20 per cent of conceptions ended spontaneously in miscarriage.

"To time a birth with that degree of accuracy is something that is fraught with problems," she said.

"I think the notion that the whole nation is going to be bonking tomorrow night in order to have a bay on a certain day is absurd."

"Of course there will be a minority of people who may think they could gain financially out of having a millennium baby — but they obviously have a problem anyway."

The millennium baby craze has been fuelled by media publicity, with television channels preparing special hospital transmissions in search of the first

British baby to be born on Jan. 1, 2000.

The private ITV channel on Saturday is to screen a two-hour show entitled "Birth Race 2000: Tonight's the Night" with a guide to conception, romantic films and a documentary on couples who are hoping for a January 1 baby.

The Superdrug chain of chemists is also joining in the frenzy, offering free pregnancy testing kits in all its 180 stores in Britain to parents aiming for a January 1 birth.

The chain has noted a 50 per cent increase in the sales of ovulation-test kits over the last few months.



Two polar bears play at their enclosure on a warm day at the Cologne zoo April 9. Weather forecast reports warm weather for the upcoming weekend in Germany (Reuters photo)

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation Established 1973
 جريدة الجordanية مستقلة سياسية منشورة بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية

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E-mail: jotimes@go.com.jo

Web Site: http://www.access2arabia.com/jordantimes/

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times Advertising Department

Collective remedy

THE FACT that Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh and his government received an unprecedented strong vote of confidence Thursday when 66 deputies stood in favour of his platform does not mean that the road ahead will be strewn with roses. The coming days are the time when the premier's Cabinet will have to roll up their sleeves and translate their policy statement into deeds.

The prime minister has already conceded that economic growth is projected to drop to about 3 per cent. With such a dire prediction, the solution to the high unemployment crisis and rampant poverty, the hallmarks of the government's goals will not be easy. It is no accident that His Majesty King Abdullah's first step in the wake of the overwhelming vote of confidence in Rawabdeh and his team was to call on him to translate into actions what the letter of designation had outlined in great detail and what the government's platform pledged to the country.

It is obvious that no government can on its own carry out all that needs to be done in the upcoming months. The people of Jordan are also called upon to implement their share of the responsibility with each sector according to its capabilities and duties. The kind of free economy and privatisation that we have painted for ourselves requires the full participation of the private sector in uplifting the national economy from its current stagnation. True capital investment needs a certain favourable climate which the government promised to create. But once the government has done its share of the burden and established the appropriate climate for investment, it becomes the responsibility of the private sector to reciprocate by expressing its vote of confidence in its own way.

The public at large also has its share of the burden. Whether wage earners or salaried employees, it is the public who determine the course of the national market. In the final analysis, it is the consumers who cast the ultimate vote of confidence. That is why we all have to pitch in and work in concert to make the future brighter and more productive.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Rai's Taher Adwan commented on the Lower House of Parliament's decision to give the vote of confidence to the government, saying it is a Constitutional necessity and a green light to the Cabinet to go ahead with its plans. However, Adwan added, every Jordanian government needs the people's confidence to remain in authority, as the parliamentary vote of confidence does not mean that the government will rule for two or four years. Although only the King can designate or dismiss governments, there is a relation between the King and the people, which determines whether the government will continue or not, said the writer. Although it is not easy to satisfy all people, the government should obtain the confidence of Jordanians, who are aware of the current challenges and that there are no magical solutions, said the writer adding that if the government succeeds in managing the Kingdom's affairs and combating corruption, it will win people's confidence. Finally, Adwan concluded, criticism, which is a motivation for the government to tackle obstacles, must not paralyse officials' performance and their ability to work on solutions to pressing problems.

Al Rai's Fahed Faneh said that while Israel receives 90 per cent of one million Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Lands annually from the U.S. and Europe, Jordan is limited to 10 per cent despite the many attractive tourist sites in the Kingdom. Faneh noted that in the year 2000, the number of pilgrims will increase to at least 4 million, which should boost the tourism industry in the country. Jordan is preparing for the event, especially after the discovery of the baptism site east of the Jordan River, which has been authenticated by the Pope, according to the writer. Israel has always been promoting a site located south of Lake Tiberias, which was visited by 400,000 tourists a year. But now Jordan is expected to receive tens of thousands of tourists, thanks to Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Agel Bilgi's efforts to put the Kingdom on the 2000 tourist map, said Faneh. Tourism, which is an exporting industry, represents Jordan's "oil," and it provides the country with \$750 million annually, more than the exports of the phosphate and potash industries put together, according to Faneh. This amount can easily be doubled if the country concentrates efforts for that purpose, and is now more practical because of the increasing numbers of hotels in Amman and other places. The year 2000 provides an excellent tourist opportunity: will Jordan meet this challenge, asked Faneh.

Predetermining the outcome of the peace process

ISRAELIS ARE accusing the European Union (EU) of prejudging the outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by subscribing to the Palestinian right to set up an independent statehood. They also cite a million reasons why the EU adopted that much-welcome statement endorsing the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people, and contend that the Europeans contradicted themselves by urging both sides not to predetermine the shape of a peace agreement. Furthermore, they assert that it was diplomatically illogical on the part of the Europeans to support the Palestinian quest for statehood.

The Israeli position is at best an assumed posture. If anyone could be accused of contradicting the basic tenets of the peace process or of trying to predetermine its outcome, no party but Israel fits the bill. But the diplomatic charade continues, as far as the politicians there are concerned. It is very much the central theme of the Israeli political approach to the peace process. They know very well that none of their governments had any intention ever of granting the Palestinians their rights. For those who sat down in Madrid, the peace process was a smokescreen for Israel's admis-

sion into the Middle Eastern order. As far they were concerned, the negotiations could be dragged out for decades, as former prime minister Shamir admitted, with Israel giving very little to the Palestinians for the next century. Their successors have only slightly moderated this approach, but not without ensuring that the Palestinians get only what Israel wants to give them. Wasn't that predetermining the outcome of the peace process on the part of Israel?

For those moderates who succeeded the hardline camp which led Israel to Madrid, the Oslo agreement offered an excellent cover: Bring the Palestinians into an agreement tailored to suit Israeli interests. Use whatever diplomatic, military and political jargon to lead the Palestinians by the nose. After all, beggars can't be choosers, and in Israeli eyes the Palestinians, and the Arabs at large, are indeed at the begging end of this equation, if only because of the military might of the Israelis. They should get only what Netanyahu wants them to have, negotiations or no negotiations. Wasn't that predetermining the outcome of the peace process on the part of Israel?

The carefully-measured "mili-

tary redeployment" in the West Bank so far has clearly pointed to a dedicated Israeli drive to ensure that the Palestinians are denied a physically viable, contiguous territorial entity which they could pronounce as the independent state of Palestine. Today, what we find on the West Bank is a Swiss cheese formula of Palestinian population centres separated by Israeli-controlled highways and access roads with Jewish settlements placed in strategic locations. The idea is clear: Israel retains and will continue to retain movements between the Palestinian population centres, and, by extension, will deny Palestinian territorial continuity. Wasn't that predetermining the outcome of the peace process on the part of Israel?

In the Oslo accord, both sides agreed not to undertake any move in Arab east Jerusalem that might change the realities on the ground. What we find today is the continuation of a systematic Israeli campaign to evict as many Palestinians as possible from the holy city, strengthen the Ashkenazi presence there and obliterate every last detail that will support the Palestinian claim to the city. Israel has reserved for itself the right to build anywhere

Jordanian Perspective



Dr. Musa Keilani

in Arab east Jerusalem while the Palestinian residents are severely punished for exercising their basic right to build in the city. The thrust of the Israeli campaign is to deprive Palestinians of physical links with Arab east Jerusalem and dilute the strength of their claims in the city ahead of discussing the city's future. If indeed Israel will ever agree to do so, Wasn't that predetermining the outcome of the peace process on the part of Israel?

One of the key elements in the peace process is the fate of the Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war and the Palestinians displaced in the 1967 war. There

is unanimous agreement that the Palestinians and Israel might never be able to reach an equitable agreement on the refugees, but, beyond that is the reality that Israel has been very pointedly dragging its feet on the immediate issue of the displaced. The former Israeli government of Shimon Peres made it abundantly clear that Arab countries which host the displaced and refugees should look for avenues to absorb their guests into their societies and "rehabilitate them." Why then the specific clauses referring to negotiations on the future of the displaced and refugees if Israel had and has no intention of recognising their rights? Wasn't that predetermining the outcome of the peace process on the part of Israel?

The list of Israeli contradictions is too long, and they are not new. We are fully aware that the dice are loaded against the Arabs every step of the way, and Israel will stop at nothing to fight off pressure from any quarters, whether European or American, to see reason in the quest for peace in the Middle East. It is up to the Europeans and Americans to fully understand the Israeli game and play their cards accordingly.

Why Jordan matters

By David Rosenberg

THE DEATH of King Hussein will almost certainly have significant consequences for the future of Middle East peace. But in the Israeli economic constellation, any fallout from cooler relations with Jordan would seem marginal.

Israel-Jordanian trade reached just \$42 million last year, about the same as Israel's trade with Bulgaria. In any event, Jordanian exports don't stay in Israel but go on to the Palestinian [National] Authority, a more appropriate market for Jordanian products. Israeli companies have invested about \$50 million in Jordan, not an especially big amount. The entire Jordanian economy is about \$8 billion a year vs. Israel's \$100 billion.

Compared to other Arab countries, Jordan has been highly receptive to Israeli trade and investment. Still, if the border were shut tight tomorrow, statistically speaking, it would barely register as a blip on the Israeli economic screen. The deeper truth, though, is that Jordan counts economically much more than it appears, on several levels.

Jordan and the rest of the Arab World are the key to the survival of many of Israel's low-tech industries. In the world of open trade and investment, Israeli firms can only compete if they can compete internationally. But in fields like textiles and basic manufacturing, where the labour-cost component is a major factor, Israel doesn't stand a chance against international competitors because the wages it pays are too high. If these industries aren't going to die, the solution is to transfer production via direct investment, joint ventures or — subcontracting — to Israel's lower-cost neighbours.

Jordan is the chief candidate for this practice, called "outsourcing," because it boasts a combination of low wages, good infrastructure, a stable political and legal environment, and, of course, it's right next door. There is much to be said for having your factory 90 minutes' drive from your headoffice rather than a 12-hour flight away. Jordan's two main competitors — the PNA and Egypt — have many of the same assets, but not all of them.

Israel's textile industry has been the first to act on this, and is the source of most Israeli investment in Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian areas. Today, 10 per cent of "Israeli" textile and apparel exports are produced in the Arab World. Given time, other industries will no doubt follow.

The second reason Jordan

'...if the border [between Israel and Jordan] were shut tight tomorrow... it would barely register as a blip on the Israeli economic screen'

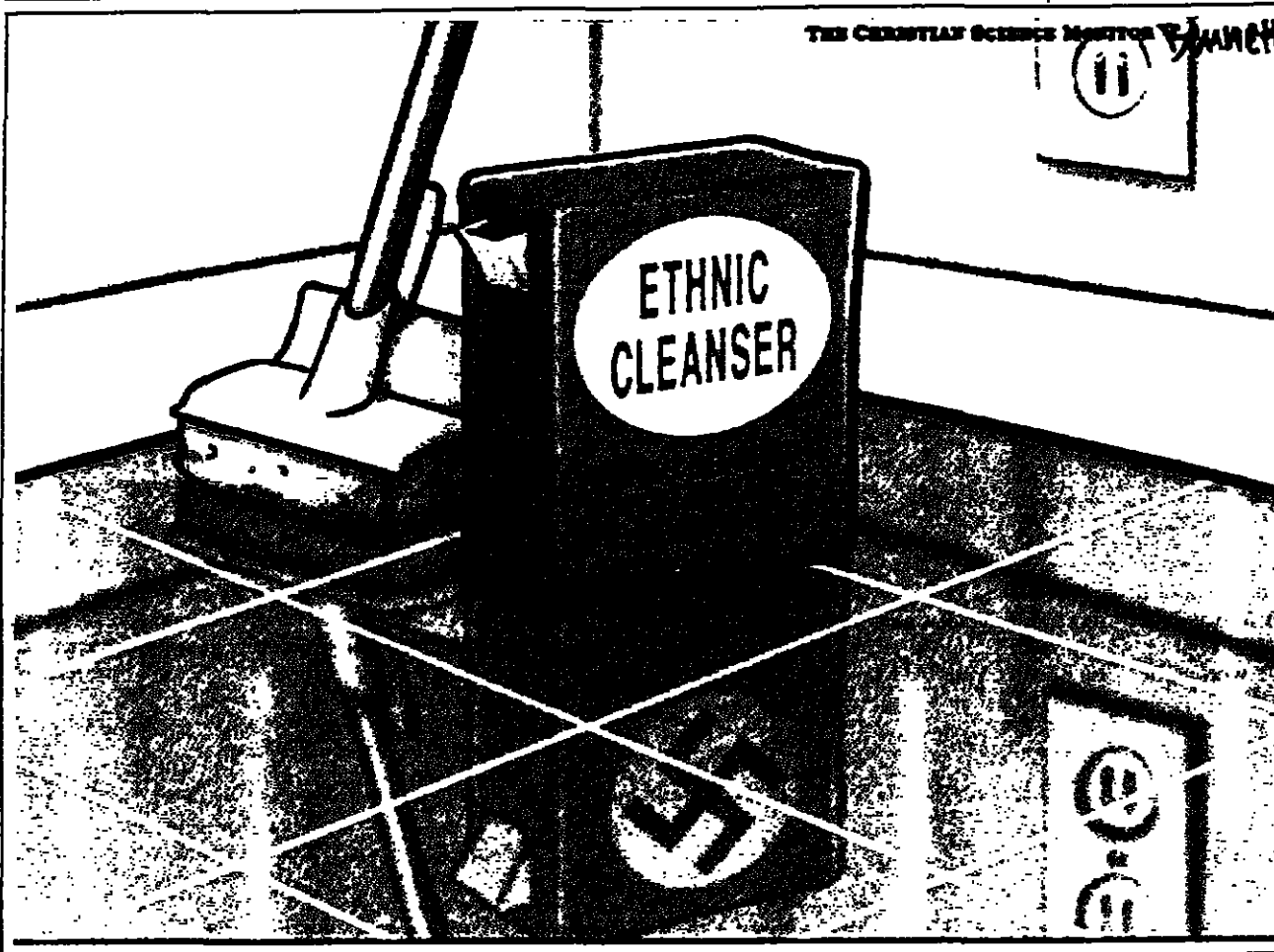
counts is more fundamental to Middle East peace than business. That's because Jordan has become the model for the long-heralded but little evidenced "peace dividend." Although total investment and trade is small, commercial relations between Israel and Jordan only go back to the signing of a commercial treaty in 1996. In that short time, one industrial park has been developed, two more are on the way and as many as 3,000 jobs have been created in Jordan. Thanks to Washington's efforts, the parks enjoy the same duty-free access to the U.S. as Israel does.

None of this adds up to an economic bonanza, but it does show that peace can lead to concrete economic benefits.

The response of many Jordanians has been, in so many words, "thanks for nothing," because Israeli investment creates low-paying factory jobs, while Israel retains management and most skilled positions. Certainly there is an element of justice in this claim, and Israelis would be naive to assume — as most do now — that this kind of relationship can be sustained indefinitely.

But the reality is that Jordan and other Arab countries have low wage scales, and that is for now their principal competitive advantage to the world economy. And those are the kind of badly needed jobs they can create. Jordan also has a relatively well-educated population, so it can and should aspire to better things quickly. With Israel (at least for now) badly in need of engineers, the day may come sooner than either side expects.

— The Jerusalem Report



Dialectics in Jordan: Light versus dark

IF EXISTENCE, as a number of religions and philosophical schools speculate, is an eternal battle between diametrically opposed forces, then Jordan presents one of the best arenas in which to witness at least a portion of this cosmic conflict. Various belief systems have described such an unending confrontation in a number of ways: "good" versus "evil," the basis of the three major monotheistic religions, "class struggle," the central tenet of Marxism, and "The Force," which seemingly battles itself throughout the three Star Wars films, are just a few examples. For those persons currently living in Jordan, the bizarre decision to remain on winter time may make one think that the country has chosen to take sides in the Zoroastrian version of the eternal conflict: light versus dark.

By disregarding geographical realities, regional and worldwide norms and practices, and plenty of what I would term good advice, the government, in rejecting daylight savings time, has firmly placed the population of the country in the dark camp of this battle. No longer will those misguided advocates of light hold sway of the proponents of dark, led by Jordan, which has taken upon itself the task of carrying the banner of dimness to all parts of the world.

Consider the ramifications of this timing decision. While people in neighbouring countries are going about their business in a carefree, easy, and light manner, aided by the additional hour of glorious twilight of an afternoon sun, the populace of Jordan must bolt for their poorly lit warrens like a pack of unwilling vampires at 6:00 (1900 GMT) in the evening. Amman is fully lit while Damascus, Cairo and Tel Aviv still enjoy the natural, and cost-free, illumination of the friendly sun.

Cost, incidentally, was apparently the main factor in the decision to retain winter time. In another odd

angle to the story, however, the move to shun daylight savings time wasn't taken because of high costs, but for the opposite reason. Summer time didn't save enough money to make it feasible, only JD500,000 or so. Surprising, for a country facing severe austerity measures and terms stipulated by that bastion of sound economic advice, the IMF, to turn its nose up at any cost-effective measure. But then again, it does make sense, in a way, when you consider that second requirement of life, water, flowing in torrents down the streets of the capital. Did someone say waste not, want not?

It also seems rather strange to attempt a radical restructuring of what I assumed was a common international understanding of the earth's rotation. When it is 5:00 p.m. in Jordan, it is 7:00 p.m. in Iraq, a country that immediately borders Israel, and 6:00 p.m. in Egypt and Jordan, countries that are farther west. Amman and Paris, as one person pointed out, are effectively in the same time zone. Galileo must be turning in his grave thanks to this illogical situation. Can we really afford to throw away centuries of precious scientific effort which proved that the earth is round and revolves in a counterclockwise manner, i.e., east to west?

Finally, while I understand the need to be different, there may be a limit to how far others in the international community will tolerate an oddball country, or, as others with more hardline views than mine might decide to term Jordan, a rogue state. It could turn out to be a serious situation. After all, time, as the saying goes, is money. And other, wealthier countries may not take it kindly if Jordan's experiment with weird time zones goes horribly wrong and costs them hard currency. I have to admit that I'm not sure how this situation could come about, but stranger things have happened.

But while we wait for the sanc-

Out of Order



Brian Brown

tions to be slapped in place and the bombs to fall in order to force Jordan to adhere to the principles and standards of the international community, we might as well try to wring some kind of advantage out of a bad situation. And as usual, I have devised the perfect means of doing so. Jordan will mount an intensive international public relations campaign to convince people to put aside their fears of visiting a country that keeps odd time, highlighting everything the country has to offer: archaeology, the Aqaba resort city, Jesus' baptism site, etc. As an added bonus, each visitor will receive a complimentary copy of the Jordan Times. But what will make this new campaign a sure-fire success will be its slogan, which captures the new spirit in the country ushered in by the bold winter time decision: "There's always time for Jordan."

RECOMMENDED READING: *Metamorphosis*, by Franz Kafka. While we're on the subject of weird occurrences, try this classic by Kafka. Gregor, the protagonist, awakens one morning to find that he has become a large insect. Following this transformation, he is shunned as an outcast, even by his own family. A seminal tale of alienation.

Feature

Gas mask

The S

Planning report delineates uses, sources of financial aid to Jordan

In February, Prime Minister Selim Hoss tried to reassure foreign investors that the

In bilateral aid, the U.S. Agency for International Development was the largest donor as it provided 40 per cent of total donations to the Kingdom, followed by Germany, 28 per cent and Japan, 26 per cent.

The association of German savings banks described the cut as "economically appropriate."

But "now you can be sure. This is it," he added.

That viewpoint was shared on Friday by the head of France's central bank, Jean-Claude Trichet, who also sits on the ECB's policy-setting governing council.

"It is a very significant reduction We are ending a cycle of a considerable lowering of (interest) rates in Europe," Trichet told *Euro*.

A similar point was made by ECB chief Duisenberg on Thursday.

"The ECB will now be able to claim, and rightly so, that it has done its part," the newspaper said. "That will enable it to exert even greater pressure on the politicians. Politicians will not be able to hide their faces if the ECB decides to

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MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR

NOTE: NEITHER ACCESS NOR THE PUBLISHER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY ERRORS OR OMISSIONS					CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN	
DEPOSIT WITHSTAY PRICES					CBSA	
CURRENCY	1 M	3 M	6 M	1 YEAR	CURRENCY	1 M
US DOLLAR	4.8000	4.8500	4.7500	5.0500	US DOLLAR	5.7500
LIBRARIAN STERLING	5.3000	5.3500	5.2500	5.5500	LIBRARIAN STERLING	5.7500
LIBRARIAN	3.0000	2.9500	2.9000	2.8500	LIBRARIAN	2.8500
LIBRARIAN MARK	5.0000	5.0500	5.0000	5.1000	LIBRARIAN MARK	5.1000
LIBRARIAN FRANC	1.5000	1.5500	1.5000	1.5500	LIBRARIAN FRANC	1.5500
LIBRARIAN	5.0000	5.0500	5.0000	5.1000	LIBRARIAN	5.1000

WORLD STOCK MARKETS					PRECIOUS METALS		
STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST CLOSE	CHANGE			
MANHATTAN	DAX	2082.29	2082.39	+0.10	SILVER	APR 20	21.18
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	17845.47	14722.58	-3122.89	GOLD	APR 20	318.10
LONDON	FTSE 100	6429.39	6439.39	+9.99	PLATINUM	APR 20	267.00
NEW YORK	DJIA	9522.42	9522.42	0.00			
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	8943.32	8943.32	0.00			
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	717.39	715.21	-2.18			

HANOI (AFP) — Prime Minister Phan Van Khai has said 30 per cent of Vietnam's state-owned enterprises are losing money and the state sector needs a major overhaul to compete in the marketplace, reports

He said that as Vietnam's protective barriers are gradually dismantled, state-owned companies will be forced to compete with private firms in a market where loss-making industries were previously subsidised by the state.

While Vietnam introduced market reforms in the late 1980s, SOEs have been slow to wean themselves from state support, and have failed to adopt to the demands of the market.

However, Khai emphasised that state-owned companies must continue to play a leading role in industrialisation, "aimed at creating strong economic corporations."

1

**"The real beauty
is how it makes one
feel"**

By DAJAN JEWELLERS www.dajanjewellers.com 1-800-451-1111

Peanuts

WHICH WOULD YOU RATHER DO, EAT BREAKFAST OR HELP ME WITH THE HOMEWORK I SHOULD HAVE DONE LAST NIGHT?

I THINK I'LL EAT BREAKFAST.

I USED ALL THE MILK..

Andy Capp

OH-POKE

IF ANY SODAS/LAYS IN NEED OF LOOSING

THANKS FOR THE OFFER, BUT I WOULD'N'T DREAM OF BYING

SHE HAS SPECIAL TERMS FOR THEM SHE'S REALLY WELL - CASH IN ADVANCE

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Mutt'n'Jeff

THERE YOU ARE, SIR!

FINE! NOW WILL YOU CUT THE BOY'S HAIR?

I'M GOING NEXT DOOR FOR SOME CIGARS!

O.K.

WHAT'S KEEPING YOUR FATHER SO LONG?

THAT AN'T MY FATHER! THAT MAN ASKED ME IF I WANTED A FREE HAIRCUT!

THE BETTER HALF.

By Glasbergen

"It's a new awards show honoring the viewers. I've been nominated for Best Sarcastism During a Chick Flick!"

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

FIRGE

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

RAIFE

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

LARPIL

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

DYNKIL

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Answer here: A

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

By Neel Arnold and Mike Anglin

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise browser, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer here: A

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(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's | Jumbles: TAWNY WRATH DECODE TAUGHT
 Answer: Mom and her newswom both needed this —
 A CHANGE

Prices of shares drop at the stock exchange

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — The general price index at the Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) slipped at the end of the past week following a decline in the share prices of most of the firms that were traded in the bourse, the stock market's weekly bulletin showed Friday.

The bulletin indicated that the drop in the general price index was due to the remarkable decline in the prices of the blue-chips, especially the Arab Bank, the Kingdom's largest financial institution and the bourse's major blue-chip.

The bank's share price slipped from JD215 in the previous week to JD212.5, the lowest price it has registered in more than a month.

Among the other firms that recorded decline in their share prices were the Jordan Cement Factories, the Arab Potash Company and the Jordan Petroleum Refinery, the bulletin showed.

The ASE weekly bulletin showed that general price index closed at 178.59 points compared to 180.32 in the previous week, or 1.73 points.

The bulletin showed that turnover amounted to JD3.7 million compared to JD1.2 million in the previous week, when trading lasted for two days following the 'Eid Al Adha' holiday.

Out of the 60 firms that were traded on the floor, share prices of 34 companies dropped, 19 registered increase while shares of seven others recorded no changes in their prices.

The bulletin showed that activities in the stock market focused on the Arab Bank, the pharmaceutical industry and the Jordan Steel Company.

The industrial sector's total turnover amounted to JD1.6 million, where Jordan Steel ranked first among the firms in this sector with a total turnover of JD375,606.

Jordan Phosphate Mines

came second with a turnover amounting to JD204,645 followed by the International Tobacco, JD191,041.

The Arab Pharmaceutical Manufacturing and Dar Al Dawa, the two major pharmaceutical firms in this field, won JD348,962, the bulletin showed.

The banking sector ranked second with a turnover of JD1.3 million, the bulk of which went to the Arab Bank, which won JD1.1 million despite the decrease in its share price.

The parallel market's turnover totalled JD924,404, where trading focused on the Century Investment Group and the Razi Pharmaceutical, where the two firms' turnover amounted to JD358,605.

The number of firms that were traded during the last week's activities totalled 23 of which only four registered increases in their prices compared to 13 firms that registered decline, the bulletin showed.

Japanese firms finally begin painful restructuring

TOKYO (AFP) — When 58-year-old Masaharu Nonaka committed suicide in front of his company president rather than take early retirement, it was a sign of the dramatic restructuring taking hold of Japanese firms.

A string of bluechip companies in the world's second largest economy have pledged in past weeks to turn their businesses around, with job cuts and rationalisations.

Nonaka's death at tyre-maker Bridgestone Corp. is also evidence of the huge resistance to staff cuts in a country where the job-for-life culture has been entrenched since the end of World War II. That has left many firms

reluctant to carry out full-scale restructuring, with most job losses coming through attrition and early retirement, rather than redundancies.

After 33 years with Bridgestone, Nonaka was farmed out to a sports subsidiary and made to take early retirement as the firm restructured.

"I will resist the cruel restructuring the company is now doing by utilising the restructuring boom of other companies," he wrote in a letter to his boss before his death two weeks ago.

But it is in part thanks to this restructuring, begun several years earlier than many Japanese firms,

Bridgestone posted record profits last year.

Other firms are now following the lead of heavyweights such as Sony Corp. and Mitsubishi Electric Corp., which have announced broad restructuring programmes in the past month.

Sony, Japan's mighty electronics giant, said it would cut its 170,000-strong workforce by 10 per cent and close one fifth of its plants worldwide.

The reorganisation puts Sony's PlayStation game console and Internet-related businesses at the heart of its operations, pushing aside traditional television and stereo sales.

Mitsubishi Electric said last week it would cut 14,000 jobs, or 10 per cent of its workforce, and spin off loss-making operations.

Hitachi Ltd. said it would cut 6,500 staff and refocus on profitable businesses.

Together these announcements have pushed up the Tokyo stock market this year to become the best performing major index in the world.

But analysts note many of these pledges to reform fall far short of what is needed.

"The risk is that most firms are still closely tied to the old ways and remain reluctant to change," said Ron Bevacqua, senior economist at Merrill Lynch in Tokyo.

"The market has focused on a few substantive restructuring announcements and other Japanese firms seem to have discovered the positive impact that restructuring announcements have on their share price, even if the contents of the plan are not as bold as those which have captured the headlines," he added.

Weak firms are still being supported by their larger rivals and capacity is not being

reduced, he noted. A shakeup of the lifetime employment system needs to be led by political changes and a new emphasis on winning over customers, not by expanding market share.

"We remain pessimistic that the corporate sector as a whole is ready for such change," Bevacqua said.

Japanese business executives, however, think the future holds far more promise.

A group of 60 firms, including some foreign companies doing business here as well as giants like Sony and Toyota Motor Corp., have been running a series of full-page advertisements in major newspapers telling Japanese workers to stop criticising and start being more positive.

"All Japanese people have become like salarymen who complain all the time," read the advertisement.

Crisis undermines one Russian bank in three — Gerashchenko

MOSCOW (AFP) — One Russian bank in three was driven to the wall by last year's financial crisis, but more than 1,000 banks are functioning without financial problems, Central Bank Chairman Viktor Gerashchenko said.

More than seven months after the August crisis erupted beneath the entire banking system, the Central Bank finally gave its verdict on how the future sector would look.

"We can say that of 1,473 banks currently in existence, around 70 per cent are financially stable and are not experiencing any difficulties and can work without any government help," Gerashchenko said.

"The remaining 30 per cent, or 441 banks, are experiencing a shortage of liquidity and funds and, as we see it, are incapable of independently getting out of the situation," he added.

The vast majority of these

would not be worth saving he said, but 44 of the biggest problem banks would have to be helped as they were sitting on a considerable chunk of the asset base and deposits of the Russian banking system. "Here we have a big problem because these 44 problem banks ... have 50 per cent of the assets of the banking system and 45 per cent of deposits of the people," Gerashchenko said.

Cars were primary motor for German exports in 1998

WIESBADEN, Germany (AFP) — Germany's auto sector was the driving force behind

export growth last year, with some 18 per cent of export revenue generated from the export

of motor vehicles, the Federal Statistics Office has said.

Car makers in Germany exported vehicles worth a total 168.2 billion marks (\$6 billion euros, \$92 billion) in 1998, 13.0 per cent more than in 1997, the office said in a statement.

German exports as a whole increased by only 6.9 per cent to 949.7 billion marks.

The export of office and data-processing equipment also expanded sharply in 1998, rising by some 12.4 per cent to 24.5 billion marks.

But the most important categories of exports were engineering products, which rose by 4.8 per cent to 147.9 billion marks, electro-technical products, which increased by 3.4 per cent to 121.3 billion marks; and chemical products, which were up 2.3 per cent at 120.8 billion marks.

The four main categories — motor vehicles, engineering, electro-technical products and chemicals — accounted for nearly 59 per cent of total German exports in 1998, the office said.

The same sectors also provided the main impulses for import growth, accounting for nearly 38 per cent of total imports.

Imports of electro-technical products increased by 7.8 per cent to 96.5 billion marks; motor vehicle imports expanded by 9.7 per cent to 80.8 billion marks; imports of chemical products were up 6.6 per cent at 73.3 billion marks; and imports of machinery and equipment grew by 8.7 per cent to 57.6 billion marks.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Your friends will be impressed to hear what you've been up to lately, and will look at you with new respect, as well they should. That's the good part. The bad part is that they could talk you into being their leader. That happens when you speak up. People ask you to take on more responsibility. Have a great time while you're at it.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You could get into a pretty good argument today with an older person, but here's a little bit of forewarning. Looks like the other guy has you outflanked when it comes to the facts. You may not be able to win with reason or logic, but you can probably win through love. That's your secret weapon. **GEMINI:** (May 21 to June 21) Don't let worries about work to be done keep you from taking a fantastic excursion. Not only will you see things you've never seen before, but you could learn a lot, especially if you take along the right companion. Today, that's somebody who knows more than you do. If you find such a person, thoroughly enjoy the learning experience.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) This is a good day to review your resources. Figure out how much you've got, and how you want it allocated. If you have a few of these decisions made now, you won't have to worry about them when the action starts getting fast and furious again. Besides, you may be pleasantly surprised. **LEO:** (July 23 to August 22) You and your mate could be committed to each other, but that doesn't mean you always agree. Today is a good example. Its hard for you to give up control, even to someone you love a lot. Today, it might work. Keep pushing, until the other person comes up with the winning idea.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) This is a good day to take on a complicated technical project. Go ahead and read the manual, and figure out how it's supposed to be done. It's a challenge now, but the result of your effort could be that your life's a lot easier. Go for it.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) It really seems like you should be able to go full speed ahead today. There are hidden dangers lurking, of which you should be aware. It would be easy to overspend, for example. Be thrifty early, so you have something left to splurge with later.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) There could be some big changes going on at your place this weekend. If so, you need to be careful. Don't put in something you'll have to change later. Think it out all the way first, so when you do it, it's done right and you can trust it to stay there. In other words, build it to last.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) If you have a friend with a chip on his or her shoulder today, watch out. Reason is not going to work with this person. Logic will fall flat, too. Don't bend the rules, though. That would just make matters worse.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) This is a good day to count your pennies and figure out how you're going to spend them. While you're at it, you may even think of a way to make more, or to save on the expenditures you had planned. Try not to spend recklessly, even if you see something you like. With just a little planning, you can get lots more for lots less. **AQUARIUS:** (January 20 to February 18) You've got a pretty good scan on what's happening, and what you don't know, you can figure out. That's why you're most likely to be chosen the leader for today's activities. Don't worry for a minute. You'll come up with something brilliant, as usual.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) It almost seems like a good day to travel, but it isn't, really. You'd be better off if you invited your date to stay home with you instead. Looks like there will be delays out there, and possibly even mechanical breakdowns. So, if you're going for a drive, better check the oil first.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

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Kournikova stays hot, beats Davenport

AMELIA ISLAND, FLORIDA (AP) — Anna Kournikova looked over to her mother and flashed a big smile she rarely shows on the court. Indeed, this was a victory to get excited about.

The ninth-seeded Kournikova defeated No. 1 seed Lindsay Davenport of the United States 6-4, 6-1 on Thursday in the Bausch and Lomb championships, a victory that intensifies the hot streak that began for the Russian about a month ago.

"I was just happy with the win," she said. "When you beat No. 2 in the world, you should be happy." Combined with her appearance in the final of the Family Circle Cup last week, Kournikova has a chance to move up as many as 11 places in the rankings over a two-week span by winning a title here.

Either way, the world's 16th-ranked player has a big upset to add to her resume. Her last victory of this magnitude came against Switzerland's Martina Hingis last May in Berlin.

"This was important for me because I haven't beaten a top, top player in

some time," she said. "So, this is very good. It gives me a lot of confidence. I need this."

Her next match will be against No. 6 seed Patty Schnyder of Switzerland, a rematch of Kournikova's victory in the semifinals last week.

Schnyder defeated Argentina's Ines Gorrochategui 7-5, 6-2.

Elsewhere in the round of 16, No. 5 Amanda Coetzer of South Africa beat No. 14 Virginia Ruano Pascual of Spain 6-1, 7-5, and Romania's Ruxandra Dragomir defeated No. 8 seed Barbara Schett of Austria 6-2, 6-2. Two days after beating American teen star Venus Williams, Canada's Sonya Jeyaseelan fell 6-4, 6-2 to Fabiola Zuluaga of Colombia.

In a late match, defending champion Mary Pierce of France, the fourth seed, overcame a spotty effort to beat No. 15 compatriot Nathalie Dechy 2-6, 6-4, 6-3.

Pierce faces a quarterfinal Thursday against No. 7 Conchita Martinez of Spain, who beat No. 10 Chanda Rubin of the United States 7-6 (8-6), 5-7, 6-2

in a test of endurance that lasted 2 hours, 40 minutes. Martinez, who won this tournament in 1995, did a nice job changing paces from the baseline on the slow green clay that suits her game perfectly.

"All these players are playing unbelievably right now," Martinez said. "It's hard, but you have to be ready to be out on the court as long as it's going to last. You can never give up and you have to know it's going to be a long match."

No. 2 Monica Seles of the United States needed only 41 minutes to defeat Alexandra Fusai of France 6-0, 6-1. Seles has lost only five games in two matches, but still has concerns about her game, especially with her next stop the Fed Cup next week.

"I'm realistic, I have to raise my level of play," said Seles, who will play Coetzer in the quarterfinals. "I need to be more consistent. I'm missing balls left and right. I'm not used to that and it's frustrating."

World Youth Championship England and Brazil struggling

LAGOS (AFP) — Brazil and England, two of the biggest names at the World Youth Championship, are struggling.

England were headed for an early exit after going down to a 1-0 defeat against Cameroon in their Group E match at Kanu on Thursday.

The English Under-20 team lost 1-0 to a 64th-minute goal from Gaspard Komol, his second of the championship.

In their opening match on

Monday, England lost 1-0 to the United States and currently stand bottom of their group, with no points and no goals scored.

Cameroon tops the group on six points, with the United States, who lost 3-1 to Japan on Thursday, level with the Japanese on three points.

Brazil, placed third in Group F after two matches, face a "difficult match" Sunday against Zambia if they are to go through to the

next round, their coach said.

Brazil lost their opening match of the three-week youth football tournament when they were defeated 2-0 on Monday by Spain, but they won 3-0 on Thursday against Honduras.

That win leaves them on three points, one point behind both Spain and Zambia in the group.

"We are going to have a difficult match against Zambia and in order to win we are going to have to play

hard," Joao Carlos da Silva Costa told reporters.

In the other Group F match on Thursday, Zambia and Spain drew 0-0.

In Group D, Mali beat Portugal 2-1 to top the group on six points while Uruguay defeated South Korea 1-0.

The top two teams from each group will go through to the second round of the championship along with the best two third-placed teams.



Chelsea's Italian player-manager Gianluca Vialli (L) is tackled by Real Mallorca defender Miquel Soler in the semi-final of the UEFA Cup Winners Cup at Stamford Bridge. The game ended in a 1-1 draw (Reuters photo)

European Cup Winners' Cup Lazio and Mallorca in strong positions

PARIS (AFP) — Italian giants Lazio and Spanish surprise packets Real Mallorca scored impressive away draws on Thursday night and are now the favourites to qualify for the last-ever European Cup Winners' Cup final.

Cup holders Chelsea suffered a serious blow to their hopes of becoming the only team ever to retain the trophy when they were held to a 1-1 draw by Mallorca in their semi-final, first-leg match at Stamford Bridge.

Only an equaliser by Norwegian substitute Tore Andre Flo, who volleyed the ball home five minutes into the second half, averted Chelsea's first-ever home defeat in Europe.

Real Mallorca's fleet-footed Spanish international Dani had expertly put the Spaniards ahead after 31 minutes when he outpaced Frank Leboeuf and rounded Chelsea goalkeeper Ed De Goey before slotting home.

In Moscow, Croatian international striker Alen Boksic — playing for the first time in almost 12 months — scored the goal that salvaged a 1-1 draw for Lazio against Lokomotiv Moscow.

Georgian international Zaza Dzanashvili, who tops the competition scoring list with six goals, scored a well-taken solo goal in the 60th minute to put Lokomotiv in front before Boksic celebrated his return to top class football after a season-long absence through a knee injury with a 76th-minute equaliser.

Hector Raul Cuper's Mallorca team, who led the Spanish first division before

Christmas and who are playing their first season in European competition, are now well-placed to progress against expensively-assembled Chelsea.

Chelsea lost possession in midfield and Yugoslav Veljko Paunovic slipped a neat pass in for Dani, a target of English club Sheffield Wednesday, to beat first Leboeuf and then De Goey before clipping the ball into the net with 12 minutes left before half-time.

Chelsea, who haven't lost in 26 previous home European ties, responded with two long-range efforts by Jody Morris and a glancing header by Marcel Desailly, but went in at the break looking in need of inspiration.

Chelsea player/coach Gianluca Vialli and his new coach Ray Wilkins, standing in for Graham Rix who was jailed for 12 months before Easter in a sex case, decided to bring on Flo at the start of the second period to add an aerial focus to their attacks.

It paid immediate dividends. Vialli swung over a cross, Zola, of all people, won the header and Flo volleyed the bouncing ball right-footed into the net from an angle to make it 1-1 after 50 minutes.

As the second half wore on the Spaniards looked increasingly in control as Chelsea tired visibly.

Goalscorer Flo said afterwards: "I don't know if we will eventually win this tie and it will be really hard for us at their place. We will have to wait and see."

Flo said Vialli had been very angry at half-time and it had motivated the team for

the second half.

France's Marcel Desailly said afterwards: "We will need patience. They will have to come out of their half and attack in the second leg and I think we will have many opportunities to score."

Both teams played cautiously in the opening 45 minutes in Moscow — probing for defensive frailties — but Dzanashvili broke the deadlock 15 minutes into the second half.

He ran through with only Lazio goalkeeper Luca Marchegiani to beat. The keeper forced Dzanashvili out wide to his left but failed to dispossess the striker, whose momentum meant he had to find goal from an acute angle.

Dzanashvili turned 360 degrees and shot acrobatically to find the net before falling to the ground and then celebrating with a somersault.

Boksic then came on for his first match since injuring his knee just before last year's World Cup, while Roberto Mancini replaced striker Marcelo Salas.

The substitutions by Lazio's Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson proved a masterstroke.

Yugoslav ace Mihajlovic crossed from the right and Mancini deftly flicked the ball on to Boksic, who powered the ball home with the outside of his right foot.

Eriksson said he was pleased with the result.

"A draw was the logical result of a match between two strong opponents," he said. "Lokomotiv turned out to be tough opposition."

Morocco and Tunisia can seal Nations Cup places

JOHANNESBURG

(AFP) — Morocco and Tunisia will become the first qualifiers for the 2000 African Nations Cup if they win pool matches this weekend.

While Morocco should defeat Togo comfortably at home in Group 2, Tunisia visit a Ugandan team desperate for revenge following a six-goal Group 7 thrashing in Tunis.

Ranked No. 1 in Africa for more than one year, Morocco owe their success to the stability created by coach Henri Michel, who guided his native France to third place at the 1986 World Cup.

Defender Nouredine Naybet, midfield playmaker Mustapha Hadji and striker Salaheddine Bassir, who line up with Spanish club Deportivo la Coruna, form the spine of the team.

Tunisia boast the only 100 per cent record at the halfway stage of the qualifiers, having recovered speedily from a disappointing 1998 World Cup campaign in France.

Italian coach Francesco Scoglio has blended many old faces with some new while the return from injury of 1998 African Nations Cup star Hassan Gabri has proved a timely bonus.

Mozambique will hope history repeats itself in a top-of-the-table Group 1 clash with Cameroon having triumphed 3-0 when the Indomitable Lions visited Maputo 16 years ago.

Cote d'Ivoire are seeking their fourth consecutive win over Congo in Abidjan while Mali must defeat Namibia in the other Group 3 match to retain any chance of overtaking the pacesetters.

Gabon defend a 28-year unbeaten home record in qualifiers against a South African team lacking goalkeeper Hans Vonk and striker Philemon Masinga due to European club commitments.

Burkina Faso will move within one point of the finals if they complete a Group 5 double over Burundi while Zambia should consolidate their leadership of Group 6 at home to struggling Kenya.

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — World 400-metre record-holder Butch Reynolds is back on track for big time athletics, and success at the World Championships in Seville in August, is high on his priority list.

After arriving in Johannesburg on Thursday to prepare for Saturday's International track and field meeting between South

Africa, England and an International Select team, the 34-year-old athlete from Atlanta said he will remain competitive until after next year's Olympic Games in Sydney.

"No world record is safe," said the tall American, in response to questions relating to his world best of 43.29 seconds which was set at a Grand Prix meeting in

Zurich in 1988.

"Records are there to be broken. Michael Johnson is an extremely strong athlete and on the right day, he can take it. The same applies to fellow Americans Antonio Pettigrew, Jerome Young and Tyrone Washington, and Britain's Iwan Thomas.

"When I set the record in Zurich, everything was right on the night. The best in the

world competed, but most importantly, the pace was fast right from the start."

Reynolds, who opened his 1999 outdoor campaign by clocking 45.13 seconds at a meeting in Florida in the United States a fortnight ago, also told reporters: "I need to work on my conditioning and the way I run the bend."

"My strength is in the way I run the straights. I believe that with guys like Johnson, Washington, Young and myself around, the USA can break their 4x400 metre world relay record of 2:54.20 set at last year's Goodwill Games in Uniondale, US, in Seville, Spain."

His main opposition at Saturday's meeting — to be staged at 1,400 metres above sea level at the Pilditch stadium — will come from South African runners in Jopie van Oudshoorn and Adriaan Botha, who have respective summer season bests of 44.88 and 45.40.

The International Select line up for Saturday includes world 800 metre indoor recordholder Maria Mutola from Mozambique, and should provide more of a match for South Africa, compared to the England team.

England are minus its star athletes such as world triple jump recordholder Jonathan Edwards, javelin throwers Steve Buckley and Mick Hill, triple jumper Ashia Hansen, and injured 800 metre runner Kelly Holmes.

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SPORTS IN BRIEF

'Schett is Austria's danger player'

SYDNEY (AFP) — Barbara Schett will be the main threat to Australia when they meet Austria for the first tie in the Federation Cup. Australia's captain Lesley Bowrey said here on Friday. The Austrian Tennis Federation has announced world No.19 Schett, along with Sylvia Plischke (39), Barbara Schwartz (121) and Patricia Warrusch (130) will take on the Australians in the World Group II first-round tie in Klagenfurt on April 17 and 18. The Australian challenge will be headed by veterans Nicole Pratt, ranked 78, and Rennae Stubbs (196), backed by youngsters Alicia Molik (101) and Jelena Dokic (206). Bowrey said 23-year-old Schett, who so far this year has reached the fourth round of the Australian Open and the semi-finals in Auckland and Sydney, was the main threat to the Australian team. "Schett has been performing well this year but so have our girls," Bowrey said. "Jelena beat Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Sandrine Testud at the Hopman Cup, and Alicia upset Natasha Zvereva in Sydney." At stake is a spot in the elite 13-nation World Group of the revamped 2000 Fed Cup competition.

Pakistani players held in Mexico

MEXICO CITY (AFP) — Mexican authorities on Thursday detained and prepared to deport nine Pakistanis, all members of a soccer club whose visas had expired, the National Migration Institute said. The Pakistanis, players and managers of a team that played in the Monterrey 99 Amateur Cup, were detained at Mexico City's airport as they prepared to board a plane to Tijuana, on the United States border. Their Mexican visas had expired on Tuesday. "The Pakistanis were trying to board a plane to Tijuana, most probably with the intention of jumping over to the other side and reaching the United States," the migration agency said. It said they would be deported later in the day.

Baric takes over as Austrian coach

VIENNA (AFP) — Croatian Otto Baric has been named Austrian coach to replace Herbert Prohaska who quit following last month's Euro 2000 qualifier 9-0 hammering against Spain in Valencia. The 65-year-old is due to meet shortly with Austrian Football Federation President Beppo Maubart. He is expected to sign his contract next week. Baric, presently coach of Austria's first division side Lask Linz, is the first foreign coach of the Austrian team since Slovenia's Branko Elsner in 1987. The 9-0 defeat against Spain was Austria's most humiliating footballing moment since they went down 11-1 to England in 1908.



Toronto Raptors' Vince Carter (L) and Boston Celtics' Paul Pierce battle for the ball during first half NBA action in Toronto. Carter and Pierce are strong candidates for NBA rookie of the year honors (Reuters photo)

Spurs beat Rockets in Houston

HOUSTON (R) — Tim Duncan had 18 points and 13 rebounds as the San Antonio Spurs used a balanced attack to defeat the Houston Rockets 92-83 on Thursday, extending their winning streak to six games. The Rockets came in with a nine-game home winning streak and could have moved past the Spurs into second place in the Midwest Division with another victory. But Duncan spearheaded the charge that saw all five Spurs starters score in double figures. "We didn't have the fire we needed," said Rockets coach Rudy Tomjanovich. "I don't understand the lack of intensity. They are a good team but I expected it to be more of a game than it was." Sean Elliott scored 10 of his 19 points in the first quarter for San Antonio, which has won nine of its last 10 games and stayed within 1 1/2 games of first-place Utah in the Midwest. "It was a war like we thought it would be," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said. "These guys compete against each other really tough. We're just happy to come out of here with a win." Hakeem Olajuwon had 27 points and 12 rebounds for Houston, which has lost twice at home to San Antonio this season. Star forward Scottie Pippen was limited to just four points in 34 minutes. "Elliott guarded Pippen most of the game and I think he did a really great job," Popovich said. "Nobody ever seems to notice how hard he works defensively." In Seattle, Gary Payton scored 20 points and Detlef Schrempf added 17 as the SuperSonics rallied from a 15-point deficit to snap the Portland Trail Blazers four-game winning streak with an 87-86 victory. Portland, which at 27-7 still has the best record in the NBA, failed to convert two chances to win at the end. Following a steal by Rasheed Wallace, the Blazers had the ball with 16 seconds left. Jim Jackson threw a high pass in the lane to Wallace, who could not come down with it cleanly. Following a scramble, the ball went off Wallace's foot and out of bounds with 1.5 seconds remaining. Portland got one last chance after Schrempf's inbound pass went off John Crotty's hands with two-tenths of a second left. But Jackson's pass from mid-court could not be tipped towards the basket as time ran out. In Toronto, Kenny Anderson, who was traded to the Raptors last season but refused to report, had 23 points and seven assists to lead the Boston Celtics past the Raptors, 101-89. Anderson was booed throughout the game. "That makes me feel really important," Anderson said. "When I was here I didn't

think anyone knew who Kenny Anderson was. It's nothing against Toronto, I just didn't want to be in another country." Antoine Walker contributed 18 points and 10 rebounds and Ron Mercer scored 14 points for Boston. In Cleveland, Penny Hardaway scored 23 points and the Orlando Magic notched their season-high fifth straight win by allowing just five baskets over the final 21-plus minutes of a 73-69 victory over the Cavaliers. Shawn Kemp collected 17 points and nine rebounds for Cleveland (17-17), which fell one game behind Philadelphia and Toronto in the race for the final two eastern conference playoff berths. The Cavs were playing their third game in three nights. At Utah, Karl Malone scored a season-high 38 points and the Jazz turned in on down the stretch for a 92-85 victory over the Golden State Warriors. In Los Angeles, Maurice Taylor scored 20 points and the Clippers used a big third quarter to snap a six-game losing streak with a 99-91 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves, defeating them for the second time this season.

Krajicek dumped out in Hong Kong quarters

HONG KONG (AFP) — World No. 4 and top seed Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands was bundled out in the quarter-finals of the \$350,000 Hong Kong Open here on Friday. A lacklustre Krajicek was beaten by Germany's Hendrik Dreekmann 6-3, 3-6, 6-3. Krajicek's departure sees the tournament robbed of its top two seeds. Second seed Patrick Rafter of Australia was knocked out in the first round. But the respite was short-lived with Dreekmann, scenting victory served his way to one of his biggest wins in his career. "I don't know what I'm doing right ... I'm just win-

ning and I don't care," said Dreekmann. He will now meet American Andre Agassi in the semi-finals. Agassi turned on the power and style to breeze into the semi-finals with a straightforward 6-2, 6-2 victory over Germany's Nicolas Kiefer. Agassi, who entered the tournament at the eleventh hour as a wild card, was in imperious form as he brushed aside Kiefer in exactly an hour. The American World No. 12 and third seed broke Kiefer twice in each set to register his third straight victory of the tournament. "I'm very pleased with the way I'm playing. It feels good to continue to this standard of play as the tournament goes on when the matches start to get tougher," said Agassi. Kiefer, 21, had his chance in the sixth game of the second set when Agassi serving to take a 4-2 lead, trailed 0-40. But the youngster continued to make unforced errors to allow Agassi off the hook. "Had he broken me at that stage, it could have turned into a battle. That was a crucial point and suddenly I was serving for the match," said Agassi.

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE

Jazireh to organise Hussein Basketball Tournament

AMMAN — Al Jazireh Club is currently preparing to hold Al Hussein Basketball Championship next February as a tribute to the late King Hussein who passed away Feb. 7. Lebanon's top clubs — Al Riyadi and Al Hikmah, as well as Alexandria's Itihad and two teams from Greece and Syria are expected to take part in the event, to be hosted by Aramex, which sponsors Al Jazireh's basketball team. Al Jazireh were Jordan's First Division basketball champion in 1997.

Pedestrian bridge to be built ahead of Games

AMMAN — The Greater Amman Municipality will construct a pedestrian bridge in the area located between the Royal Cultural Centre, the media centre of the 9th Pan-Arab Games — Al Hussein Tournament, and the Regency Hotel. Amman Mayor Nidal Hadid said a num-



ber of engineers will start setting up a feasibility study for the bridge, aiming at regulating the movement of more than 4,000 athletes, officials and media representatives, who will be staying in hotels in that area.

Taekwondo federation sets agenda

AMMAN — The Jordan Taekwondo Federation (JTF) will soon name its delegation, which will participate in the 14th International Championship for men and the 7th for women from June 2-6. During a recent meeting, chaired by Federation President Tahsin Shurdum, the JTF also decided to take part in the 3rd Vietnam International Championship from July 18-17, and to hold a training camp in Taiwan from July 19-Aug. 9. Meanwhile, the national taekwondo team left for Iran to participate in the 11th Tehran International Championship for men. During the competition, which comes as part of preparations for the 9th Pan-Arab Games, the team will play against Korea, Iran, Taiwan, Egypt, Morocco Turkey and other countries' teams.

Sydney discovers unwanted Asian tourist

SYDNEY (AFP) — Australian health officials have ordered round-the-clock surveillance in Sydney port following the detection of the dreaded Asian tiger mosquito. Officials say the insect, which can carry potentially deadly viruses such as yellow fever and dengue fever, was caught in a routine surveillance trap set by quarantine officers at Sydney's Port Botany. A ship carrying tyres from Japan is considered the most likely source.

The Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) warned that though just one insect was found, a single pregnant female could be enough to give the pest a foothold. Entomologists say it is an aggressive breeder with the potential to take over the habitat of more docile local species, it bites ferociously all day long, and it spreads serious disease. It is not the first time Aedes Albopictus has been found in Australia, but it has never been identified further south than sub-tropical Queensland. The discovery is particularly worrying to New South Wales authorities in the middle of preparations to welcome tens of thousands of visitors here for the New Year's Eve Millennium celebrations and for the Olympics in September next year. Sydney will be among the first major cities to see in the new Millennium. Health and quarantine officials who held an emergency meeting here last week to discuss contingency control measures immediately

ordered an extensive programme of trapping and surveillance. Insectal fumigation will begin if any more of the insects are found. "We have been expecting to find it in Sydney eventually," an AQIS spokesman told AFP. "It is not uncommon in north Queensland, but it is further south than we are used to which naturally gets us interested. "It is a mosquito which is a very successful coloniser and it has spread widely around the world so it is really inevitable that it would be detected here eventually. It is very aggressive in the reproductive sense." AQIS entomologist James Walker told The Bulletin magazine that the mosquito's potential to carry the life-threatening dengue fever are of major concern to health authorities. "The potential for a dengue outbreak in Sydney becomes quite high if the mosquito can establish itself here," he said. "It's the world's most efficient vector of dengue fever." The World Health

Organisation regards dengue fever as the most important viral disease affecting humans that can be transmitted by mosquitoes. The tiger mosquito, which likes an urban environment, also carries a number of other diseases including the debilitating Ross River virus which has not yet touched Sydney. Experts say it has the capacity to establish itself in all Australia's major cities although its natural range is Papua New Guinea, the Indian Ocean, India, Pakistan, China and as far north as Japan. New South Wales Health Department said Friday that in association with the AQIS it had instigated an enhanced surveillance system in and around Port Botany area following discovery of a single Asian tiger mosquito. "This type of mosquito has previously been detected in tropical areas in Queensland and the Northern Territory," it said. "Early detection has assisted in stopping the species becoming established in these states."

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Princess Sarvath Community College
Tel.: 5154605, 5159482, Fax: 5151293

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMMAM MIRSHI
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TOO MUCH PRESSURE

Both vulnerable. East deals.

NORTH
♠ K J 10 9
♥ K 10 4
♦ K 8
♣ 10 8 5 4
WEST
♠ 6 5 4
♥ 8 3
♦ Q 9 6 5
♣ Q 9 3 2
EAST
♠ 2
♥ Q 9 7 6 2
♦ A 10 4 3
♣ A K 6
SOUTH
♠ A Q 8 7 3
♥ A J 5
♦ J 7 2
♣ J 7

The bidding:
EAST SOUTH WEST NORTH
12 14 Pass 20
Pass JNT Pass JNT
Pass Pass

Opening lead: Eight of ♣

The textbooks tell you that the most desirable game contracts, if enough strength exists in the combined holdings, are, in order: four of a major when an eight-card, or better, trump fit is available; three no trump, if there is no major fit; and five of a minor, where you need to take 11 tricks to score the game bonus. But there are exceptions to every rule.

This hand was played in a rubber-bridge game at New York's prestigious Regency Whist Club. North's heart cue-bid showed a limit raise or better in spades. When South showed interest in a no-trump game, North decided that nine tricks might be easier to come to than 10, and raised to game in no trump. Note that, as the cards lie, four spades has no play. Three no trump, however, was another matter. West led the eight of hearts, taken in the closed hand with the jack. Declarer's first move was to lead a low club, not that it mattered. West elected to rise with the queen to lead another heart through dummy's K 10. Declarer took the trick with the king in dummy, then ran five spades, discarding a club from the table. East, who had to make four discards, had an impossible problem. Two diamonds and one heart were easy pitches to find; the last was another matter. If East discarded another diamond, declarer would lead a low diamond and duck on the table, setting up the king. Whether the defender discarded a heart or a club made no difference. Declarer cashed the remaining heart, then exited with a club, forcing East to set up dummy's king of diamonds as the fulfilling trick.

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Army dissidents kill Niger president

NIAMEY (R) — Dissident soldiers ambushed Niger's President Ibrahim Bare Maïnassara at Niamey airport on Friday and the government said he had been killed.

Prime Minister Ibrahim Assane Mayaki announced Maïnassara's death in a broadcast on state radio but said only that he had been killed in an "unfortunate accident." Police and witnesses at the airport reported the ambush earlier.

"In the morning of Friday, an unfortunate accident resulted in the sudden death of the president of the republic," Mayaki said after hours of confusion in the capital.

He said Maïnassara's death came "at a particularly grave moment in the history of our country," a reference to growing political tension following chaotic local elections in February.

Mayaki went on to announce the dissolution of parliament and the suspension of political activity.

Although he said the present administration would continue in office until a national unity government took over, it was unclear who was really calling the shots.

Residents said calm reigned in the capital, with troops who earlier came out with tanks guarding the presidential palace, the airport and key ministries.

Witnesses and police sources at the airport said the ambush took place as Maïnassara was preparing to travel to the interior.

A correspondent for Radio France International reported from Niamey that body had been moved from the airport to a city clinic that residents said was owned by the president's wife.

Some members of the president's security staff were wounded critically in the attack, police and military sources said.

The airport was closed and officials said Air France had

cancelled a flight due to arrive later on Friday.

Earlier on Friday, troops with tanks moved into the streets, blocking access to the presidential palace and other key locations.

It was difficult to say if the assassination was part of a coup bid, and if so what had happened to the perpetrators.

Mainassara, 49, a former army chief, ended Niger's first attempt at multi-party democracy with a coup in January 1996 that toppled an elected government.

Since winning a disputed presidential election in July of that year, Mainassara had faced relentless pressure from a militant opposition spearheaded largely by leaders of the civilian government he overthrew.

His government has been grappling with a spate of public service strikes that have further paralysed the ailing economy of the debt-saddled Sahelian state.

Friday's events climaxed a

week of mounting political tension over the confused February elections.

The political temperature rose sharply on Thursday after an opposition call for resignation following a supreme court order for poll reruns in the majority of districts.

Vote counting in February was disrupted by violent attacks on poll centres as the opposition appeared in the lead.

Earlier on Friday and before death, state radio broadcast a government communiqué appealing for calm and vowing that authorities would deal with troublemakers.

"Court decisions are final and cannot be contested by either the government or the administration, the civilian population or the military," it said.

Telephone communications with the former French colony whose key neighbours are Nigeria and Algeria remained cut.

Israeli army shells planned site of camp for Lebanese expellees

RASHAYA (AFP) — Israel bombed Friday a no-man's land in southern Lebanon following reports of plans to set up a camp there for Lebanese expelled from Israeli-occupied southern Lebanon, security sources said.

Israeli artillery fired rockets, tank cannon and heavy machine-guns at roads leading to the Marj Al Zuhour no-man's land, located in south-eastern Lebanon and adjacent to the eastern sector of the border zone, they said.

An Israeli MK reconnaissance plane was also seen flying over the region earlier Friday, they said.

"It seems the Israelis have taken plans to establish a camp in Marj Al Zuhour very seriously and is flexing its muscles to show the Lebanese authorities that will not allow

such a camp," an official told AFP.

Lebanese authorities have hinted at plans to set up a camp that could accommodate up to 300 Lebanese expelled from southern Lebanon since Israel withdrew to the current line of control in 1985.

Many believe the camp would be a repeat of the Marj Al Zuhour makeshift tent camp where 417 Palestinians deported by Israel in 1992 remained stranded for a year before the Jewish state agreed to take them back.

Plans provided for the projected camp to be placed under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Expulsions from the border zone have recently increased, despite repeated protests by the Lebanese authorities who

consider them violations of the Geneva conventions and the April 1996 truce accord between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hizbollah which prohibits the harming of civilians.

Since Jan. 7, Israel has expelled about 50 residents of the town of Shebaa which had more than 40,000 residents before Israel's 1978 occupation of southern Lebanon but today counts just 3,000 inhabitants.

Most of those expelled by Israel were relatives of militiamen who deserted from its proxy South Lebanon Army (SLA) and crossed into the government-held zone.

European Union special envoy Miguel Angel Moratinos, after meeting with Lebanese President Emile Lahoud in Beirut on Thursday,

said he would urge the Israeli authorities to end the expulsions of Lebanese residents from occupied southern Lebanon.

Lebanon has also filed a complaint over the expulsions from Shebaa with the international committee which monitors the April 1996 truce.

The committee said in a statement after a day-long session on Thursday that "there were differing views on whether this incident fell within the mandates of the April understanding."

"At the same time, the group noted the issue has been raised in other (diplomatic) channels and is being addressed by appropriate authorities," said the panel, made up of delegates from France, Syria and the United States as well as Israel and Lebanon.



BULLFIGHTER HURDLES A BULL: A bullfighter jumps over a bull with a pole in a theatrical performance of the traditional 'Salto de la Garrocha' (Jump of the Garrocha) in the Seville convention centre on Friday. The show pays homage to the bulls used in traditional bullfights on the opening day of an international festival (Reuters photo)

U.N. Security Council members disappointed with Iraq rejection

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.N. Security Council members expressed disappointment Friday with Iraq's rejection of U.N. panels set up to redraw U.N. strategy after December air strikes polarised the council.

In a report distributed here, Iraq charged that the panel on disarmament was "biased" and based on flawed premises as it reflected the views of panel members drawn from the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM), accused by Baghdad of spying for the Americans.

The Iraqi paper dismissed the recommendations of a second panel on the humanitarian situation saying that the Iraqi government would never accept the "trusteeship" of Iraq as proposed.

The report ignored the conclusions of the third panel, which said that Iraq had not fully complied with demands to repatriate prisoners and property seized during the 1990 Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

Panel Chairman Celso Amorim of Brazil disputed Iraq's conclusions, saying that the panels were "solid, well-intentioned" and "a serious effort to find replies."

"I would hope that the Iraqis would at least keep their wait-and-see attitude," he said.

U.S. Ambassador Peter Burleigh, reacting to the Iraqi response, told reporters: "It was very unfortunate because the Iraqis seem to have basi-

cally rejected most of it out of hand, and the council is looking forward to Iraqi cooperation and compliance."

But British Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock played down the response as he arrived for council discussions on the panel reports, saying: "I think we've got quite a long way to go in the discussion in the council."

"Why doesn't Iraq wait and see what comes out of it?" Russian Ambassador Sergei Lavrov noted that "it will be impossible to achieve a result without ensuring Iraqi cooperation, and this is very much on our mind."

"But it's very early to speculate. I am not saying that we are anywhere except making a first step," he added.

Non-permanent council members Bahrain, Canada and Slovenia joined the chorus of disappointment.

Bahrain Ambassador Jassim Buallay said, "Iraq is an important part in all this. The total rejection is disappointing."

"This is disturbing. The response is termed in very strong terms. I think inappropriately, and it doesn't help," said Ambassador Danilo Turk of Slovenia.

Canadian Ambassador Robert Fowler, who first proposed setting up the panels, said the Iraqi response was "an initial reaction."

He hoped that once the council had concluded its discussions, expected to last weeks, "the Iraqis might find

that there is something in it for them."

The most contentious panel was that on disarmament, on which the five permanent members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — remain divided.

Under U.N. resolutions, the eight-and-a-half-year-old oil embargo can only be lifted when all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have been dismantled.

But Washington and London continue to resist proposals from China, France and Russia to lift the sanctions as an incentive to Iraq to cooperate with future long-term monitoring efforts.

The panel concluded that not all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction had been eliminated, notably in the chemical and biological field.

But it suggested that the remaining issues could be dealt with a new intrusive long-term monitoring system and a "renovated" UNSCOM, currently tasked with Iraqi disarmament.

UNSCOM Chairman Richard Butler was not at Friday's closed-door session, after deciding not to risk being barred by Russia from attending the discussions for the second time since Wednesday.

Butler's French political adviser, Eric Fournier, had hoped to attend Friday's session but was told that an UNSCOM representative would not be welcome. Western diplomats said.



Car sex could lead to three years in jail

ROME (R) — In the movies, Kevin Costner and Sean Young did it in a car in Washington DC. Leonardo Di Caprio and Kate Winslet did it in a vintage car below deck on the Titanic. But from now on, in Italy, sex in the backseat could get you three years in jail. Italy's highest appellate court has quashed a 200,000 lire (\$176) fine imposed on a couple caught making love in a car for engaging in an "indecent public act." In its judgement late on Thursday, however, the court of Cassation found that car sex constitutes the more serious crime of an "obscene act," which is punishable by up to three years in prison.

Weird inventions get notice

LONDON (R) — Floating furniture, musical condoms and a do-it-yourself hairless kit have been put in the top ranks of the world's wildest inventions. The gas-filled furniture was designed to float up to the ceiling when not in use, to give more space. The musical condoms burst into song when the right pressure was applied. The hairbrush detector was a simple tube attached from mouth to nose. The science magazine Focus, which listed the gadgets, had checked through patent records to find which were the weirdest inventions ever concocted. Also among their quickest discoveries was the "Tootse tube" for snug winter nights — a pipe which caught a person's breath and funnelled it down the bed to keep the toes warm.

Netanyahu billed for missing forks

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — It may have been a case of whodunnit at the Georgian president's guest palace when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his entourage spent the night and some of the silverware went missing. But there was no mystery about where to send the bill. President Eduard Shevardnadze forwarded the Israeli leader a \$80 bill, along with an itemised list of 12 towels, two TV remote controls, one clothes brush, seven knives, nine forks and four fish forks noted as "broken or missing" when the Israeli delegation left Shevardnadze's guest house on March 23. Calling the missing items "a matter of normal wear and tear," Netanyahu spokesman Avi Bushinsky said the Israeli government would pay the bill.

Sailor find love letter from WWI

LONDON (R) — A fisherman has caught a British soldier's last message in a bottle to his wife, 85 years after it was thrown into the sea. Private Thomas Hughes wrote the message to his wife on the way to the trenches in France. Twelve days later he was dead. After reeling the old bottle, fisherman Steve Gowan told Thursday's Sun tabloid: "It looked very old and when I wiped the grit and dirt off, I could see what appeared to be a note inside it." Bidding farewell to his wife, Hughes wrote: "Ta ta sweet for the present — your hubby."

France claims most surnames

PARIS (AFP) — France has two families named Zorro and 44 Assolins but the last person hobbled with the surname of Hitler had it changed in 1946, says a book that claims the French have the world's largest number of names. "France has around a million different patronyms. It is both a world record and an evolving heritage — 200,000 names have disappeared in a century while 520,000 new surnames have appeared," writes Laurent Fardant in "The Atlas of Surnames in France." The book, based on data from the INSEE national statistics office, records for example that since 1891, 100 people were born with the name Grenouille (Frog), some of whom changed it to the more aristocratic-sounding De la Tang (literally From the Pond).

NEWS IN BRIEF

Libyan airline to resume flights

CAIRO (AFP) — Libyan Arab Airlines (LAA) will resume flights within two weeks following U.N. suspension of a seven-year air and arms embargo on Tripoli, company President Mohammad Absim said here on Friday. He was speaking to reporters before leaving Cairo for Jordan as part of an Arab tour to discuss with regional aviation officials LAA's return to international skies. "The seven years of embargo harmed the company's fleet, which comprises 27 planes including Boeing 727 and Fokkers, and navigation equipment at Tripoli airport because we could not buy spare parts," Absim said. He said LAA will eventually announce a plan to develop its fleet in a bid to face up to international competition.

'Peace progress will lead to attacks'

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will lead to greater efforts by Palestinian Islamists to commit suicide attacks against Israelis, according to a report published Friday. The report by the State Prosecutor's Office and Shin Bet security service published in the Haaretz newspaper said suicide attacks were "ironically the direct result of progress in the peace process which terrorist organisations want to stop with their actions." "Since the signing of the Oslo autonomy accord [in 1993] and the launch of peace negotiations with the Palestinians the terrorist threat has intensified," the report said. The report said the number of anti-Israeli attacks has fallen since the election of right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in May 1996 and the subsequent stalemate in the peace process. The number of deaths from anti-Israeli attacks has fallen from 63 in 1996 to 29 in 1997 and 11 last year, the report said.

'IAEA found no material at Iraqi palaces'

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found no trace of nuclear activities during inspections last year of Iraqi presidential palaces, an IAEA report said Thursday. The IAEA's six-monthly report to the U.N. Security Council, obtained by AFP, said that "environmental samples" were taken during U.N. inspections of eight so-called presidential sites from March 26 to April 3 last year. Analysis of the results, received in the last six months, "to date, shows no indication of the presence of proscribed materials or the conduct of proscribed activities at any of the sites visited," the report said. The inspections of the eight presidential sites, which Iraq declared off-limits to the U.N. weapons inspectors in November, were organised in the presence of diplomats under an agreement signed by U.N. chief Kofi Annan and Iraq in February last year.

Iran official urges clampdown on attire

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's conservative judiciary chief Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi called for a government clampdown Friday on the increasing relaxation of the strict dress code for women imposed following the 1979 Islamic revolution. "It's the government's duty to demand respect for the dress code in public places, cinemas, parks, shops and on the street," Yazdi told worshippers at the main Muslim weekly prayers here. Since the shock presidential election victory of moderate cleric Mohammad Khatami in 1997, women have grown increasingly bold in their defiance of the dress code, particularly in the middle class northern suburbs of the capital. The code requires women to cover their hair with an austere headscarf but more and more women wear brightly coloured scarves far back on their heads revealing elaborate hair styles underneath.

Demonstration at site of Deir Yassin massacre

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM

(AFP) — Dozens of Palestinians and Israeli Arabs demonstrated Friday on the west Jerusalem site where Israeli soldiers in 1948 massacred residents of the Arab village of Deir Yassin.

One hundred demonstrators came from Orient House, the Palestinian headquarters in Arab east Jerusalem, to Kfar Shaul, a religious Jewish neighbourhood now located on the site of Deir Yassin which was destroyed in the fighting which led to Israel's creation.

The demonstrators, who included a handful of Deir Yassin survivors, gathered at the graveyard below the few stone buildings which remain of the village and laid wreaths and set up gravestones at the site.

"This place represents the beginning of our tragedy and is a symbol of it," Faisal Hussein, the PLO Executive Committee member in charge of the Jerusalem portfolio, told the crowd.

"We should guard this place and we must see that such

things do not happen again. What is happening today in Kosovo is a reminder to us of that fact," Hussein said.

The demonstrators, most of them women, were also accompanied by Mohammad Zuhdi Nashed, the finance minister in the Palestinian National Authority and, like Hussein, a descendant of a prominent Jerusalem family. Israeli police and a large media presence escorted the marchers but there was no violence and no arrests.

The village, the remnants of which have been converted into a psychiatric hospital, was stormed April 10, 1948 by Israeli soldiers.

Also on Friday, about 150 Israelis protested Friday against Jewish settlement of Palestinian territory in the West Bank city of Hebron, a frequent flashpoint for Arab-Israeli confrontation, witnesses said.

"We will not allow Hebron to become another Kosovo," Mossi Raz, secretary general of the Peace Now group, told the crowd.

Mubarak to take S. Korean message of peace to North

SEOUL (AFP) —

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Friday agreed to act as a peace envoy between rival South and North Korea, as he threw his weight behind Seoul's policy of peaceful engagement with its communist rival.

South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung asked Mubarak to help the two Koreas end more than half a century of enmity.

"I asked President Mubarak to play a role as fair mediator with North Korea by taking advantage of Egypt's close relations with Pyongyang," Kim said after a summit with Mubarak, the first Egyptian leader to visit South Korea.

"We are quite interested to see what the North's response will be to our message," Kim added as South Korean officials said Mubarak was planning a visit to North Korea later this year.

Egypt has had close ties with North Korea for 41 years. Mubarak, while not commenting on a possible visit to

the Stalinist bastion, said he would pass on the offer to North Korea's reclusive leader Kim Jong-il.

"I will endeavour to do whatever I can," Mubarak told a joint press conference.

While this would be the first time Egypt has publicly taken on a role of peace-broker between its old Cold War ally and its new economic partner, it has already acted as intermediary.

Egypt's ambassador in Seoul, Hussein Derar, said his country had already acted as a "secret inter-Korean messenger" conveying messages of reconciliation from Seoul. Pyongyang so far shunned Seoul's gestures.

But Yonhap News Agency said Kim Jong-il sent Mubarak a letter last year in which he said he was "seriously studying the intentions" of Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy."

Mubarak said on the first day of his maiden two-day visit aimed at boosting ties, he had "very good" relations

with Kim Jong-il's father, Kim Il-Sung. Just a year after he died in 1994, Cairo normalised relations with Seoul.

Mubarak was commander in chief of Egypt's air force in 1973 when North Korea sent fighters and pilots to help in the war against Israel. He visited Pyongyang in 1983, 1985 and 1990.

Officials said Cairo's traditional close links with North Korea and its new relationship with the South gave it a special advantage as a mediator between the nations divided by the last Cold War frontier.

Trade was the other dominant factor in the summit between Kim and Mubarak, who is accompanied on his northeast Asian tour by five ministers and 27 industry leaders.

Kim noted that over the past four years, bilateral trade had quadrupled and Seoul's investment in Egypt stood at \$160 million by 10 firms, a figure which would "certainly jump in the near future."

Two-way trade stood at \$590 million in 1997. The two countries hope that figure will expand to \$1 billion by next year.

The two signed an agreement on scientific and technical cooperation, while Mubarak asked South Korea to follow-up on an agreement, reached when Prime Minister Kim Jong-Pil visited Cairo in February, to help Egypt build a textile weaving plant.

Seoul is seeking access to the Egyptian construction market, in which LG International Corp. said it had won a \$110 million contract from Egypt to build a PVC plant.

Mubarak lamented the fact that Middle East talks on the Palestinian question and other regional issues have remained deadlocked for months.

The Egyptian delegation was to leave on Saturday after visiting the National Cemetery, for Japan, the last leg of a three-nation northeast Asian swing which also took it to China.